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The Heir Presumptive and the Heir Apparent.

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"KIRSTEEN," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XV.

THIS strange state of things continued for some days. Mary found herself living as in a state of siege. She was permitted to visit the children in the nursery, and nurse was quite polite. She was also supplied with what she required, her little meals sent to her, the morning-room prepared for her inhabitation, and the housemaid who attended to her civil, but otherwise she was made to understand that her position was one of sufferance, and her presence exceedingly undesirable. This was all the more strange that she had already been left alone in the house on more than one occasion with no such result, the servants, if not very anxious to please her, being always at least observant of civility and making no stand against her. She reflected, however, that her previous experience had been only of a few days, and that a fortnight was a long time for such a community to be put under the sway of a stranger like herself, whom they had no right to obey, and whom, with the spirit of their class, they despised as at once better and not so good as themselves—an inferior with the appearance of a superior—far below themselves in independence, while apparently placed over them. Mary, being obliged to think upon the subject by the strange circumstances in which she found herself, made all these excuses and explanations of the conduct of the conspirators, and ended by thinking that on the whole it was natural, though very uncomfortable, and that she could quite understand their way of thinking. But there was no doubt that

it was very unpleasant. Sounds of revelry reached her from the servants' hall every night ; the men lounged about all day and smoked where they pleased ; the rooms were locked up, and nothing done. Jane, the housemaid, informed her that they all thought they had a right to a rest. "There's a deal to do in this house. Them hunting and fishing things, if it was nothing else, puts Mr. Saunders and John in a continual worrit, special when there's gentlemen coming that don't bring a vally—and half the gentlemen here don't. We've all made up our minds as we'll have a good rest."

"They might have done that, Jane, without behaving as they have done in other ways."

"Oh, I don't know," said Jane, tossing her head. "Men don't stand being put upon."

"You do it," said Mary. "I know that you are not doing any work, and perhaps it is not necessary ; but you are civil to me."

"You was always civil to me, miss," said Jane. "I don't like to see you put upon no more than the rest. But you'll allow as it's hard upon the men, with their spirits, to have somebody left behind to spy upon them, and that not one of the family. Not quite a—one as isn't no better, perhaps—oh, I'm sure I beg your pardon, miss !"

"Well," said Mary, doing what she could to suppress her indignation, "supposing all that was true, how are they to meet Mrs. Parke when she comes home ?"

"Oh, miss," said Jane, "they say you'll never tell her. Mr. Saunders says as you'd never throw us all out of our places, and put the family to such inconvenience. It would be dreadful troublesome to get new servants just in the middle of winter. If we all got our month's warning it would throw it just before Christmas as we left. Mr. Saunders says, if you did do it, Mrs. Parke would just pay no attention. It would be inconvenient. And he says he's sure you'd have more consideration than to make us all lose our places. And Mrs. Cook, she says——"

"I don't want to hear what they say. I think they have neither hearts nor consciences," said Mary indignantly.

"Oh, as for that, miss," said Jane, "we're just the same as other folks, I suppose. We think what's pleasing to ourselves first."

And Mary had to admit that if they had neither hearts nor consciences they had heads, and judged the position fairly enough.

For though she was very indignant and might have denounced the conspirators on the spur of the moment had she had the opportunity, she knew that her courage would have failed her when it came to the point, and that to deprive the servants of their living was what she never could have done. Saunders had a wife and family. John had a mother whom he was supposed to help. The saucy housemaid was a widow with a child. And it was also true that Letitia would think twice before she dismissed all her servants so near Christmas. The calculation was very close all round. And then the nurse, whose verbal impertinence vexed Mary most, was all the time exceedingly careful of the children. There was nothing to find fault with in that respect. Mary thus felt herself caught in the meshes of the conspiracy, and did not know what to do.

And all the time Lord Frogmore's letter was locked up in her desk; and she had as yet made no reply to it. It was the thing, perhaps, on the whole which made the persecution in the house less important to her. What did it matter what Saunders and his kind might do? The humiliation which they inflicted made her smart for the moment, but it was not so bad even now as the careless civility which she had borne from their masters, or the no-account which was generally made of such a person as herself in the world. She was well used to all that. And to think that by a word at any moment she would put a stop to it all and change everything! She did not answer the letter, she could scarcely tell why. Not that it did not occupy her day and night. She thought of it in all ways, turning it over and over. It was a sort of occupation to her, which obliterated everything else, to think what she should say. What should she say? And then the long round of questioning, of balancing one side against the other, would begin.

There was this advance, however, that Mary had come to a perfect conviction that, were she unhampered by others, she herself could be happy with Lord Frogmore. To marry at all and enter upon a mode of life so entirely new is a shock to a middle-aged woman. The old maid has hindrances in her way in this particular which do not affect the girl. She has formed all her habits often with a certain rigidity, and to be brought into relations so close as those of matrimonial life, to give up her seclusion, her privacy, to share everything with another, has a

sort of horror in it. Mary, too, had something of the primness which in some natures accompanies that modest withdrawal from the mysteries of life. To a girl it is all romance ; to a woman other reflections come in. She had moments of panic in which she asked herself how she could bear such a revolution of existence. It is, however, so deeply impressed upon the feminine mind that to be married is the better and higher state, a doctrine largely emphasized by the contempt of the foolish, that she was half ashamed of her own shrinking, and knew that everybody would consider it fantastical, even if for sheer modesty she had ever breathed to any one the confession that she felt this panic and shrinking, which was very unlikely. That was a sentiment never to be disclosed, to be got over as best she could, to be ignored altogether. But putting aside that shock to all her habits both of mind and life, there was nothing in her which objected to Lord Frogmore. He was kind ; he was old ; he would need her care, her help, her services. He was the least alarming companion that could be thought of ; he was sympathetic, and understood her—and she thought she understood him.

But Letitia ! There the struggle began. Letitia would not like it ! Mary could not salve her conscience by the hasty advice given with such frankness by Mrs. Parke. To marry any old gentleman who might present himself with money enough to support her, and provide for her when he died, was one thing ; to marry Lord Frogmore was another. The mere idea that Mary might be Lady Anything while Letitia was Mrs. Parke would be an offence—but Lady Frogmore ! What would Letitia say ? How would she like it ? She would never forgive that promotion. The thought of Mary walking out of a room before her, placed at table before her, would drive her frantic. If that were all how gladly would Mary give up to her any such distinction ! But that was not all. There were the children, who would, as Letitia thought, be defrauded by their uncle's marriage. That was a matter which it was not so easy to get over. She tried to represent to herself that Lord Frogmore was rich, that it was not certain he would leave all he had to the children, that in any case he would be just, and that whatever he appropriated to himself would at least go back to the children on his death. She had taken out her paper, seated herself at the table, prepared her pen (with little anxious cares that it should be a good one) to write,

half a dozen times at least, and had been stopped by that thought of the children. That was a thought that could not be got over. To take this away from the children—how could she do it? If she were to endeavour to make the condition that no money should be given to her (which crossed her mind for a moment), Mary had too much good sense not to see that this would be impossible, and also foolish and unjust. And then she had laid down her pen again, and put by her paper, and returned to herself to think out that problem—with equal failure. Defraud the children, take from them their inheritance—how could she do it, she who had been like their aunt, like a second mother? She retired before that thought with continued affright. It was a barrier she could not get over. And so the letter was put off day after day.

She had met the children in their walk one morning, and gone on with them, glad of the companionship, pleased that little Letty should abandon the group to cling to her hand and rub against her with a way the child had, like an affectionate dog, and that Duke, in his little imperious way, should place himself exactly before her, walking a step in advance, so that Mary had to restrain her own movements not to tread on him, one of these little inconveniences which to people who love children are pleasant, as signs of the liking of the little tyrants. She had begun in her usual way to tell them a story, when the nurse, who walked majestically in the rear of the party, interfered.

"If you don't mind me saying it, miss," said nurse, who was too well bred herself not to know that this mode of address was particularly offensive to a person of Mary's age, "I'd much rather you did not tell them stories."

"But —!" cried Mary with astonishment, "I have always told them stories—it's what they expect whenever they see me."

"That may be," said the nurse, "but I don't myself hold with working up their little brains like that. When their mamma is here she can judge for herself; but I can't have them put off their sleep, and excited, and not able to get their proper rest —"

"But that has never happened," cried Mary.

"It's quite soon enough, then, if it happens now."

"Well, no doubt that is unanswerable," said Mary, with a

laugh, and she added half playfully, half vexed, "I think you want to keep me from saying anything to the children at all."

"I don't want to be any way disagreeable, miss," said nurse, "but so long as my mistress is away, and I've all the responsibility, that is just what I'd like best."

"Why," cried Mary inadvertently, "I stayed here on purpose."

"To spy upon us and watch all we did," said the woman, red and angry. "We all know that; and that is just what I will never put up with if there wasn't another situation in the world."

Mary had for the moment forgotten the humiliation of her present position, which made this sudden assault almost more than she could bear. She disengaged herself with a little difficulty from the children and hurried in, feeling that she must take some immediate resolution and free herself from these insults. Saunders and the footman were playing a game of billiards in the hall when she entered hastily, the great door being open. In the extreme freedom of this new *régime*, Saunders, so proper and correct in the presence of his master, had fallen into habits of self-indulgence, and was, indeed, most generally under an exhilarating influence, which made him very ready to exhibit his wit at the expense of any butt that might present itself, secure of the admiration and applause of his subordinates in the house. Mary had become rather afraid of an encounter with the butler in these circumstances, and started a little as she came suddenly upon him in her hurried passage indoors. He came forward to meet her with his cue in his hand.

"Well, Miss 'Ill," he said, "I hope I see you well this fine mornin'. Been to the post to send off your report, eh, and tell how the servants is going on?"

"Let me pass," Mary said.

"We hope you've given us a good report, miss. We're nothing but poor servants a-strivin' to do our dooties," said Saunders, with an air of mock humility, which sent the footman into such screams of obsequious laughter that he had to throw down his cue and hold his sides, with exclamations of "Oh, Lord, don't, Mr. Saunders! You'll kill me with laughing afore you've done."

"And if you was to give us a bad report what 'ud become of us?" said Saunders. "But we hopes you won't say nothing more than you can prove, Miss 'Ill. And what are *you*," he added, changing his tone, "but a servant yourself, and worse off than

any of us, currying favour with bringing other folks into trouble, or tryin' to bring folks into trouble? But you'll not succeed this time, miss, I'll promise you. We knows what to expect, and we're on our guard. Hi, old man! what are you wanting? The bosses ain't at home; can't you see that with half an eye? Stop a bit, miss; I ain't done with you yet."

"Oh, good Lord, Mr. Saunders!" cried the footman in a tone of alarm.

"Let me pass, please," said Mary, trembling, and quite unaware what strong succours had arrived behind.

The next sound was a firm foot upon the floor coming in, the next a voice which made Mary's heart jump up to her throat.

"Where is my brother, sir? where is your master? and how dare you speak to a lady like that?" said Lord Frogmore.

Lord Frogmore! Saunders himself, whose countenance was a wonder to behold as he dropped the cue and backed against the table, limp and helpless, his mouth open, his eyes bursting from their sockets with wonder and fright, was scarcely more discomposed than Mary, who felt herself in a moment vindicated, restored to her proper place, protected and avenged, yet at the same time more agitated and shaken than she had ever been in her life. She turned round and saw him before her, his eyes sparkling with anger, his neat small person towering, as it seemed, over the discomfited servants, driven back by the first glance of him into servile humiliation. Lord Frogmore's voice, which generally was a mild and rather small voice, thundered through the hall. "You disrespectful rascal! How dare you speak to a lady in that tone?"

"My lord!" Saunders cried, faltering. At first he could not even think of a word to say for himself. The footman discreetly stole away.

"My brother is absent, I suppose, and Mrs. Parke; and, you cowardly scamp, you wretched snob, you take this opportunity——"

"Oh, Lord Frogmore, don't be severe upon the man. He thought I had written about him to his mistress. Please don't say any more."

"I shall write about him to his mistress," said Lord Frogmore, "or to his master, which will be more effectual. John Parke is no brother of mine if he does not turn such a fellow neck and

crop out of the house. Get out of my sight, you brute, if you don't want to be kicked out." Saunders was twice Lord Frogmore's size and half his age, but the old gentleman made him cower like a whipped dog. He made a faint effort to bluster.

"I'm responsible to my own master, my lord; I'll answer to him."

"By Jove," said the old lord, "you shall answer to a sound thrashing if you stay here a moment longer. Out of my sight! Miss Hill," he said, turning round and offering Mary his arm, "I suppose there is some room where I can say a word to you. It is clear that you cannot remain an hour longer in this house."

CHAPTER XVI.

SHE took him upstairs to the morning-room, in which she had been living, and which was full of traces of her habitation and ways—the book on the table, the work, even the writing-paper and the new pen which all this time she had been trying to use to answer his letter. Her heart was beating as wildly as if she had been a young girl—beating with pride, with pleasure, with gratitude, and with that satisfaction in being vindicated and re-established which it is impossible for human nature not to feel. It was no doubt a very poor foe who had thus been flung under her feet; but he had been able to humiliate and insult her. And Mary felt as proud of her deliverer as if he had faced the dragon. His very age and physical unimportance made her only the more conscious of the force and mastery he had shown—a man accustomed to command, accustomed to hold a foremost place. What a difference it had made to everything the moment he had appeared! The very atmosphere had changed. It had become impossible for any one in the world to show her anything but respect and reverence as soon as Lord Frogmore had come. What a difference! What a difference! Mary had never filled that imposing place, never had it made evident as a matter of certainty that wherever she appeared respect must necessarily attend her. She had been respected in her modesty by those who knew her, but no one had ever thought it necessary to give to Mary the first place. What a difference! The first inarticulate feeling in her mind was this, which brought her up as upon a stream of new life. Everything had been different from the

moment he had appeared. No more insult, no further call for self-assertion, no need to take any trouble. His presence did it all. Where he was there would always be honour, observance, regard.

These thoughts surged through her mind as she went upstairs with him through the empty house, in which all at once, instinctively, without anything said, she had become as a queen. There was no longer any question in her mind as to what she should say. All was said, it seemed to Mary. Could the lady who had been delivered from the dragon think what she should say to her Redcross Knight? It was ridiculous to be so high-flown—and yet it was the only simile she could think of. Dragons are different in different cases—sometimes they mean only poverty, humiliation, the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes, and not any great heroic danger, which the champion can make an end of: her champion had ended for her in a moment the fear of all these things. He had made her see what would be her fate henceforward if she trusted herself to him. He was a little gentleman, of short stature, of appearance rather neat than fine, resembling anything in the world rather than St. George. He was old—was he old? surely not so old as was thought; surely not, as Letitia made him out, an antediluvian, a person out of date, whom only his own egotism and the care of Rogers kept alive to keep other people out of their rights. To look at him, with his active step, his eyes that grew quite bright and blue in his anger, the colour as of a winter apple in his cheek, his neat well-cared-for person—it was almost absurd, Mary thought, to call him an old man at all.

Lord Frogmore put her into a chair when they reached the morning-room, and bade her rest a little. "I came to see if there was not an answer to my letter," he said, "but there are other things more important to be thought of first. How long have you been here alone exposed to these impertinencies? You can't be left to run such a risk again."

"Oh, it doesn't really matter now; it is all over now," said Mary, with a faint smile.

"You are trembling still," said the old lord. "I have a thousand minds to go and thrash the fellow still."

"Oh, no," she said, putting out her hand as if to detain him. "I am not afraid of anything now."

The old gentleman took the hand which she held out. "Do you mean to give me this, Mary?" he said.

Upon this she roused herself, and with a changing colour made her last stand. "Oh, Lord Frogmore, I could do nothing that would be injurious to the children," she said.

"The children! What children? There are no children," said the old lord, thinking of himself only and his own concerns. Then he perceived her meaning with a sudden, quick start, letting her hand drop in his impatience. "What," he said, "is it John's children you are bringing up in this ridiculous way? My dear, when John succeeds me he will be quite rich enough to provide for his own children. I have nothing to do with them. If you put the children in my way and in the way of my happiness in my old age, they shall never get a penny from me. I shall leave everything I can away from them. Be sure you will do them harm, and not good, by bringing them up between you and me."

"Lord Frogmore—I would not do them harm for anything in the world."

"Well," he said, with a smile, "you will do them a great deal of harm if you bring them in between us. I remember now what Mrs. John told you: that all I had belonged to them. She is an odious woman."

"Lord Frogmore!"

"Don't say anything more, my dear. She is an odious woman. You have not found it out, because you think everybody as good as yourself. She it is who is the cause of the impudence of her servants as well as of many other wrong things. No, my dear, let Mrs. John and her brats go by. I am an old man, Mary; that is the worst of it. I can't hope to stand by you very long. Do you think you can like me well enough to give me the best chance of living to be a Methuselah? I'll live as long as ever I can if you'll share my life with me, Mary, my dear."

"Oh, Lord Frogmore!" she said.

And as a matter of fact, Mary said very little more. They came to understand each other very thoroughly without many words on her part. When the hour of luncheon arrived it produced no tray carried by the under-housemaid, as was usual, but John, the footman, in his best livery to announce that my lord was served in the dining-room. "You mean Miss Hill is served," said the old gentleman sternly. And John humbly begged his

lordship's pardon. Saunders kept out of sight, not trusting himself in Lord Frogmore's presence. And the way in which Lord Frogmore talked at lunch was soon reported all over the house, and carried a universal shudder. "I shall lose no time in letting my brother know what has been going on," he said. "And I don't think you should stay here any longer. Mrs. John would be unhappy if she knew to what you are exposed."

"Oh," said Mary, "they will be kinder now."

"Kinder! I could not let any lady run such a risk. I suppose they know that you would not say anything as long as you could help it. That is the penalty of being too good."

"They did not think at all," said Mary. "They supposed I was to be a spy and tell everything. But don't, please, take much notice, Lord Frogmore. In another month Mr. Parke and Letitia will be back again."

"You must not remain another night," said the old gentleman. "Allow me to have the pleasure of taking you home. I cannot consent to your remaining here."

John went downstairs much and deeply impressed. He told the assembled company in the servants' hall that his lordship had said nothing to him personally. "But the rest of you may just get ready to go. Mr. Saunders won't get even his month's warning. That much I can tell you, and you'll have to clear out—but there's nothink against me."

"Nobody can say," said cook, "as I've shown any incivility to Miss 'Ill. I'm one as likes Miss 'Ill. I always did say as you was going too far."

"I've never said a word, good, bad, or indifferent," said the housemaid, "since the first day; and then it was John as sauced her, and I only looked on."

"I never sauced her," cried John.

Saunders alone was silent. His confederates had all given him up, as is inevitable in such circumstances, and it was very evident that there was no help possible for him. There was dismay also in the nursery, but in those regions the authorities held apart and did not compromise themselves in the servants' hall.

Mary, however, felt herself taken hold of as by a little benevolent providence when she was taken in hand by Lord Frogmore. He arranged at once a little programme for her. It was too late

now to go up so far as Yorkshire that afternoon, so he permitted her to remain for the night at Greenpark, to pack and arrange for her journey. He himself in the meanwhile would remain at the railway hotel near the station, and in the morning he would come for her and take her home. It was very startling to Mary to be thus swept away. She had herself strongly developed the instinct of putting up with what was disagreeable—with the certainty that there were many things in life which it was impossible to mend, and which had to be borne as cheerfully as possible. But Lord Frogmore had no mind to put up with anything. The idea of enduring a moment's annoyance which could be prevented seemed folly to the imperative old gentleman. The difference was that he had always had it in his power to prevent the greater part at least of the annoyances of life, whereas Mary never had possessed that power. He whirled her away next day in a reserved carriage with all the luxury with which it was possible to surround a railway journey, she who had been accustomed to a humble corner in the second class, and deposited her that evening in the Vicarage in a tumult of joy and excitement which it would be impossible to describe. The old people, the vicar and his wife, were indeed full of alarm, terrified by the telegram that announced Mary's immediate return, and troubled to think that something must have happened to account for so sudden and important a journey. They had comforted each other by the reflection that it could not be Mary's fault, Mary, who was always so good and patient. But an event so sudden is always alarming, and it took them a long time to understand the rights of the matter, and what Lord Frogmore had to do with it, and what they had to do with him. Old Mr. Hill was not very much older than Lord Frogmore, but he was not nearly so lively either in intelligence or in physique, and it required a great deal of explanation to make him understand the real state of the case. Mary going to marry—that old gentleman! This was the first thought of the unsophisticated household. The thought that Mary was to become Lady Frogmore did not penetrate their minds till some time after. As for Mary herself the process was quite different. She had actually forgotten that Lord Frogmore was an old gentleman, nearly as old as her father, and the idea of being Lady Frogmore had become quite familiar, and caused her no excitement. She was still troubled about

Letitia, and the possible money to the children, but otherwise she had begun to regard her own prospects with a satisfied calm. It is astonishing how quickly the mind accustoms itself to a new resolution even when it entails a revolution in life. Mary was surprised, and even a little offended, that her family should have so much difficulty in understanding her position. "My dear," her mother said, "I hope you have well considered what you are going to do. Lord Frogmore is a very nice gentleman, but he is only five years younger than your father. I looked him up in the peerage. Mary, he is sixty-six."

"Is that all?" said Mary. "Letitia speaks as if he were a hundred; but, mother, for a woman forty is almost as old."

"Oh, what nonsense," said Mrs. Hill, "more than a quarter of a century of difference! It is a great temptation in a worldly point of view, my dear, but, Mary——!"

Mr. Hill was a venerable person of large bulk, whose voice came out of the depths of his throat, and who was, Mary said to herself with energy, a hundred years older than Lord Frogmore. He had a large head, with heavy white hair, and always a solemn aspect. This big white head he shook slowly at his daughter, and said, mumbling, "You must think it well over, my child, you must think it well over—we mustn't do anything rashly." As if it were possible to deliberate further when everything was settled, when Mary had brought her old lover home and accepted his escort and allowed him to disentangle her from her troubles! She felt vexed and angry with the objections, which proved what excellent people, how unworldly, and how simple-minded her parents were.

"What I think of is Tisch, and what a fuss she will be in," said Agnes, Mary's sister, in whose voice there was perhaps a note of exultation over the discomfiture of Letitia. This it was that made Mary falter and grow pale. Her just duty was to write to Letitia, and how, oh how, was this to be done? The other remarks of her family only made her impatient with their futility—as if she did not like Lord Frogmore as well, nay better, for being old and having need of her! But Letitia! She put it off for three days, pleading to herself that she was tired; that she must have a rest; that until Lord Frogmore went away she could do nothing. To tell the truth, it was a relief when Lord Frogmore went away. The shabby little vicarage on the edge of the moors

was not congenial to him. He did not know what to say to the mumbling old vicar, who was so very conscious of being only five years older than his intending son-in-law, but who was a hundred years older, as Mary truly felt. And there was but one spare room at the Vicarage, the chimney of which, being very little used, smoked when a fire was lit (the Hills themselves had no fires in their bedrooms, on the theory that it was a piece of self-indulgence and extravagance, though coal was cheap enough), and there was not a corner for Rogers, without whom Lord Frogmore was not at his ease, nor taken care of as he required to be. These drawbacks a bridegroom of twenty-six or thirty-six might have made a jest of, but at sixty-six it is another matter. And Mary was very glad when he went away. He was to return in a fortnight for the marriage with a special licence, though there was just time for the banns to be proclaimed in Grocombe Church three Sundays, a formula which the vicar would not dispense with. Mary saw the old lord away with a sense of satisfaction. But she went back to the Vicarage with a cold trembling all over her. The letter to Letitia could be put off no longer.

Truth compels us to say that it was a most specious letter—a letter in which innocence was made to look like guilt, a letter full of excuses, of explanations, of deprecations, trying to show how she could have done nothing else, how no harm could follow, and yet that the culprit was conscious of a thousand dreadful consequences. The effort of writing it made Mary ill. She kept her bed in a fever of anxiety and excitement, counting the hours till Letitia should receive it, thinking, with her heart in her mouth, "Now she has got it, what will she say? What will she do?"

It did not take a very long time to show what Letitia meant to say and do. Mary thought the world had come to an end when she heard by return of post, as it were, a carriage—that is, a cab from the nearest station—rattle up to the door with every crazy spring and buckle jingling as if in fury, and heard a whirlwind in the passage, and rising up tremblingly, beheld her mother's little parlour fill, as by an excited crowd, with two impetuous figures—Letitia, pale with passion, and behind her the imposing form of the Dowager Lady Frogmore.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE parlour at Grocombe Vicarage was but a small room and a shabby one. There was a drawing-room, which was the admiration of the parish, into which all visitors were shown, but Mrs. Hill and her daughters had too much respect for it to use it commonly ; and the centre of their domestic life was the parlour, where all their makings and mendings were done, and where Agnes did not disdain to boil the eggs in the morning and make the toast for tea, both of which operations were so much better done, she thought, when "you did them yourself." She had been making a dress for her mother ; indeed, the very dress in which Mrs. Hill intended to appear "at the ceremony," and the large old sofa which stood between the door and the window was rendered unavailable for all the ordinary uses of a sofa by having the materials of this dress stretched out upon it. Mary was in a chair by the fire with a white knitted shawl wrapped round her, much oppressed with her cold. There was a little tea kettle upon the old-fashioned hob of the grate. It may be supposed with what a start of discomposure and vexation the invalid of the moment started up when the door of this sanctuary was flung open and the visitors appeared. Fearful under any circumstances would have been the sight of Letitia to Mary at this moment, but in the drawing-room she might at least have been kept at arm's length. She stumbled to her feet with a cry ; her nose was red, her eyes were streaming, and the feverish misery of her cold depressed any spirit with which she might have met this invasion. Letitia, on the other hand, swept in like an army, her head high, her hazel eyes blazing like fire, full of the energy of wrath. She was a small woman, but she might have been a giantess for the effect she produced. After her there came a personage really large enough to fill the little parlour, but who produced no such effect as Letitia, notwithstanding that she swept down a rickety table with the wind of her going as she hobbled and halted in. But Mary recognised with another thrill of alarm the Dowager Lady Frogmore, and felt as if her last day had come.

Letitia swept in and did not say a word till she had reached the chair which Mary had hurriedly vacated. She had the air of bearing down upon her unfortunate friend, who retreated towards

the only window which filled the little room with cold wintry light. "Well!" Mrs. Parke cried, as she came to a sudden pause, facing Mary with a threatening look. "Well!" But it was ill she meant.

"Well—Letitia," cried poor Mary, faintly.

"I have come to know if it was you that wrote me that disgraceful letter. Could it be you? Tell me, Mary, it's all some terrible mistake, and that I have not lost my friend."

"Oh, Letitia! You have lost no friend. I—I hope—we shall always be friends."

"Did you write that letter?" said Letitia, coming a step nearer. "You, that I trusted in with my whole heart—that I took out of this wretched place where you were starving, and made you as happy as the day is long. Was it you—that wrote to me like that, Mary Hill?"

Mary was capable of no response. She fell back upon the window and stood leaning against it, nervously twisting and untwisting her shawl.

"Letitia," said the Dowager from behind, "don't agitate yourself—and me. Tell this person that it can't go any further. We won't allow it, and that's enough. We've come here to put a stop to it." Lady Frogmore emphasized what she said with a stamp of a large foot upon the floor. Her voice was husky and hoarse by nature, and she was out of breath either with fretting or with the unusual rapidity of motion, which had brought her in like a heavy barge, tugged in the wake of a little bustling steam-boat. She cast a glance round to see if there was a comfortable chair, and dropped heavily into that which was sacred to the vicar, on the other side of the fire, from which she looked round, contemplating the shabby parlour and the figure of Mary in her shawl against the window. "We've come—to put a stop to it," she repeated in her deep voice.

Now Mary, though held by many bonds to Letitia, had at the bottom of her mild nature a spark of spirit—and it flashed through her mind involuntarily that it was she who would soon be Lady Frogmore, and that this large disagreeable woman was only the Dowager. *She* put a stop to it! So impudent a threat gave Mary courage. "I don't know," she said, "who has any business to interfere; and I don't think there is any one who has any right. I don't say that to you, Letitia. You are not like

any one else. I very much wish—oh, if you would only let me ! —to explain everything to you."

"She has every right," said Mrs. Parke ; "and so has my husband. I suppose you don't know that this is Lady Frogmore ?"

"I know that it is—the Dowager," said Mary

She was aware, quite aware of what was in her heart, the meaning underneath, which Letitia understood with an access of fury. In Mary's mild voice there was a distinct consciousness that this title was hers—hers ! the poor dependent, the less than governess ! Mrs. Parke made a step forward as if she would have fallen upon her antagonist.

"You think that's what you'll be ! Oh, you Judas, taking advantage of all I've done for you ! Oh, you wicked, treacherous, designing woman ! You wouldn't have had enough to eat if I hadn't taken you in. Look at this wretched hole of a place and think what rooms you've had to live in the last six years—and pretending to care for the children, and bringing them to ruin ! I've heard of such treachery, but I never, never thought I'd ever live to see it, and see it in you. I trusted you like a sister ; you know I did. It was all I could do to keep the children from calling you Aunt Mary, as if you belonged to them ; and you nobody—nobody at all ! I got into trouble with my husband about you, for he couldn't bear to see you always there. Oh, Mary, Mary Hill ! where would you have been all these years but for me ? And to turn upon me like this, and ruin me—I that was always so good to you ! "

This address melted Mary into tears and helplessness. "Letitia," she said, with a sob, "I never, never denied you had been kind, and I love the children, as if—as if—they were my own. It will be no worse for the children. Oh, if you only would believe what I say ! I asked him before I would give him any answer, and he said, 'No, no, it would make no difference to the children.' I would rather die than hurt them ; but he said no, no, that it would hurt them if I refused, Letitia ! "

"Oh !" said Mrs. Parke. "So you're our benefactor, it appears. Grandmamma, this lady is going to patronize us, you'll be glad to hear. She has taken care of the children before she would accept his beautiful love. Oh !" cried Letitia, in her desperation, clenching the hand which was out of her muff as if she would have

knocked down her former friend. She drew a long breath of fury, and then she said, "You think nobody can interfere! You think a noble family can be played upon by any wicked, treacherous thing that likes to try, and that no one can do anything to stop it! But you're mistaken there—you're mistaken there!"

Foam flew from Letitia's lips. In her excitement she began to cry—hot tears of rage gathering in her eyes, and a spasm in her throat breaking the words. She sat down in the chair which Mary had so hurriedly vacated, overcome by passion, but carrying on her angry protest with mingled sobs and threats only half articulate. Poor Mary could not stand against the storm. A cold shiver of alarm lest this might turn out to be true mingled with the shiver of her cold, which answered to the draughts from the window. Hunted out of her warm corner by the fire, exposed to the chill, her heart sinking, her cough coming on, there is no telling to what depth of dejection poor Mary might have fallen. She was saved for the moment at least by the rush at the door of her mother and sister, who, after a pause of wonder and many consultations, had at last decided that it was their duty to be present to support Mary—however grand and exalted her visitors might be. They came in one after the other, a little awed but eager, not knowing what to expect. But they both in the same moment recognized Letitia and rushed towards her with open arms and a cry of, "Oh, Tisch!" in the full intention of embracing and rejoicing over such an old friend. "Why didn't you send for me, Mary?" cried Mrs. Hill. "I thought it was some grand stranger, and it's Tisch, our dear old Tisch! What a pleasure to see you here again, my dear!"

Mrs. Parke put on a visage of stone. She could not avoid the touch of the mistress of the house, who seized upon her hand with friendly eagerness, but she drew back from the kiss which was about to follow, and ignored Agnes altogether with a stony gaze. "I'm sorry I can't meet you in the old way," she said. "I was a child then and everything's changed now. We have come here upon business, and unpleasant business too. I'm glad to see you, however, for you will have sense enough to know what I mean."

"Sense enough to know what she means!" cried the vicar's wife. "I am sure I don't know what that means to begin with, Tisch Ravelstone! You were never so wonderfully clever that it wanted sense to understand you—so far as I know."

"I am the Honourable Mrs. Parke and this is Lady Frogmore," said Letitia with angry dignity. "Now perhaps you understand."

"Not in the least, unless it's congratulations you mean, and that sort of thing; but you do not look much like congratulators," said Mrs. Hill. She drew a chair to the table and sat down and confronted the visitors firmly. "It looks as if you did not like the match," she said.

"The match—shall never be," said Lady Frogmore, in that voice which proceeded out of her boots, waving her arm, which was made majestic by the lace and jet of her cloak.

"It shall never be!" cried Letitia. "Never! My husband has already taken steps—"

"My son—has taken steps—the family will not allow it. They will never allow it."

"Never!" said Letitia, raising her voice until it was almost a scream. "Never! if we should carry it into every court in the land."

The ladies of the Vicarage were very much startled. They lived out of the world. They did not know what privileges might remain with the nobility, for whom such excellent people have an almost superstitious regard, and the boldness of an assertion, whatever it was, had at all times a great effect upon them. For the moment Mrs. Hill could only stare, and did not know what to reply. She reflected that she might do harm if she spoke too boldly, and that it might be wiser to temporize. And she also reflected that the sight of a man was apt to daunt feminine visitors who might be going too far. She said, therefore, after that stare of consternation, "I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Tisch, nor how you can put a stop to a marriage; but perhaps the vicar may understand. Agnes, tell your father to come here. I am sorry you did not take this lady to the drawing-room, Tisch—you, who know the house so well. This is the room we sit in in the morning, where we do all our little household jobs. Agnes is making me my dress for the ceremony, and everything is in confusion. Dressmaking always does make a mess," said Mrs. Hill, rising with dignity to arrange, yet with a quick fling of the long breadths of the silk spread out on the sofa to dazzle the spectators with a glimpse of the dress which she was to wear at the ceremony. She then addressed herself to Mary, who still stood shivering in the window. "My dear," she said, "you'll get

your cold a great deal worse, standing there. Yes, I see Tisch has got your chair, but come here to the corner of the fire—she'll make a little room for you. It's a pity she should have such a bad cold just on the eve— Oh, here is the vicar. This is Lady Frogmore, my dear. What did you say, Mary? The Dowager Lady Frogmore? Yes, to be sure. And this is my husband, Mr. Hill. As for the other lady, you know very well, my dear, who she is."

"Why, it's Tisch!" said the vicar, "my little Tisch! Who would have thought it? Why, we ought to have the bells ringing, for you haven't been here, have you, since you were married, Tisch? and cheated me out of that, too, which was unkind. Anyhow, you are very welcome, my dear." He took her hand in both of his and swung her by it, which was the vicar's way. He was a large flabby old man, with much *bonhomie* of manner, and ended off everything he said with a laugh. Letitia had not been able to avoid the paternal greeting. But she pulled her hand away as soon as that was possible. All these references to her absence and to her marriage were gall and wormwood to Mrs. Parke.

The vicar looked round after this, much discomfited by finding himself ousted from his usual chair. He wavered for a moment, not knowing where to go, but finally planted himself in front of the fire, leaning his shoulders against the mantelpiece. He had an old coat on, very much glazed and shabby, and a large limp white neckcloth, fully deserving of that name, loosely tied. He looked round him, amiable and a little unctuous, not perceiving, for his faculties were not very alert, the storm in the air. "Well, ladies," he said, "I suppose you've come to talk things over, and all the fal-lals and things for the wedding, eh? It's astonishing what interest ladies always take in anything of this kind, though they can't be called, can they, on this occasion, the young couple?" He chuckled in his limp good-humour, as he stood and warmed himself. "Only six years, I'll give you my word for it, younger than myself—and going to be my son-in-law—but Mary there doesn't seem to mind."

His laugh had the most curious effect in that atmosphere charged with fiery elements. It was so easy, so devoid of any alarm or possibility of disturbance. Tisch, who knew very well that all that could be done was to frighten these simple people if

possible, had too much sense not to see that her mission would be a failure, furious as she was ; but the Dowager had not this saving salt. She held out her arm again with all the lace and the jet. "We've come to put a stop to it," she said.

"Eh?" said the vicar. His chuckle was a little different now, and he repeated it at the end of his ejaculation, which was scarcely a question.

"They've come," said Mrs. Hill, raising her voice, "to put a stop to Mary's marriage. Don't you know? They won't have it ; they won't allow it. They say a noble family—— Mr. Hill, don't you hear?"

For he went on chuckling, which was exasperating, and made his wife and daughters long to seize him by the shoulders and shake him. "Oh," he said, "they're going to put a stop to Mary's marriage? How are they going to do that, my dear? Has he got another wife living?" And the vicar chuckled more than ever at such a good joke.

"Father!" and "my dear!" cried daughter and wife, simultaneously, in indignation. But the vicar went on laughing, unmoved.

"Well?" he said. "We don't know much about his life. He might have had several other wives living—he's old enough. And that's the only way I know."

"It shall be put a stop to," cried the Dowager ; "my son has taken steps. My son has been heir presumptive ever since he was born. It shall be put a stop to. If no one else will do it, I'll do it. I'll have him shut up. I'll have him put in an asylum. He can't be allowed to ruin the family. Letitia, can't you speak?"

"My good lady," said the vicar, carried out of himself and out of his natural respect for a peeress by his amusement and elation in being sent for and looked up to as the arbiter, which was a new and unusual position for this good man. "My good lady, is it Frogmore you are speaking of?" He laughed all the time so that all the women could have murdered him. "Frogmore! I'd like to see any one shut up Frogmore in an asylum, or dictate to him what he is to do." He stopped to laugh again with the most profound enjoyment of the joke. "I think I never heard anything so good. Frogmore! Why, he's only in his sixties—six years younger than I am. Do you think you could put me in an asylum, or make me give up anything I wanted to do, my dear?" He looked up at

his wife and rippled over with laughter, while she, almost put upon the other side by this appeal, gave him a glance which might have slain the vicar on the spot. The ladies of his house habitually dictated to the vicar ; they put no faith in his power of acting for himself. What he proposed to do they generally found much fault with, and considered him to require constant guidance. But now for once he had his revenge. He went on chuckling over it till their nerves could scarcely sustain the irritation ; but for the moment the vicar was master of the situation, and no one dared say him nay.

Letitia had taken no part in this, such sense as she had showing her that it was vain to maintain that altogether hopeless struggle. She had her own undertaking ready to her hand, and a much more hopeful one. Mary, who had been placed by her mother in a low chair close to the corner of the fire, was so near to her as to be at her mercy. The vicar's large person standing in front of the fire shut them off from the rest, throwing a shadow over this pair ; and while he occupied the entire space over them with his voice and his laugh, Letitia caught at Mary's shoulder and began another argument in her ear.

"Mary Hill," she said, "you know you daren't look me in the face."

"I have done you no harm, Letitia," said Mary, trembling.

"You are going to take my children's bread out of their mouths. They'll have nothing—nothing ! For how can we save off our allowance ? The little things will be ruined, and all through you."

"Letitia, oh, for goodness' sake, listen to me for a minute. He says it will make no difference. They will not be the worse. I told him I would do nothing against them—and he says if I refuse he will cut them off altogether. Letitia——!"

"Don't talk nonsense to me, Mary Hill ! Do you think he will not rather leave his money to his own children than to ours ?"

"He has no children," said Mary.

"No, not now ; but when a man is going to get married——"

"Letitia !"

"Oh, don't be a fool, Mary Hill ! You're not a baby not to know. When a man marries—if he were Methuselah—one knows what he looks for. John and I would scorn to ask anything from you, though you will ruin us too. But the children ! A mother must fight for her children. Poor little Duke, whom

you always pretended to be so fond of—he's fond of you, poor child—he sent his love to his Aunt Mary, little thinking they will all be ruined—because of you——”

“ Letitia, oh what can I do ? ”

“ You can give him up,” said Mrs. Parke, “ in a moment. It will not give you much trouble to do that. An old fool like Frogmore, an old precise, wearisome old —. Why, he's older than your father: and you who are engaged to my poor brother Ralph—such a fine man.”

“ I never was engaged to your brother Ralph ! ” cried Mary, with indignation.

“ You say so now; but if one had asked you ten years ago ! We might make up a little something for him even now—a little goes a long way in Australia ; and with some one whom he was fond of to keep him right, Mary——”

“ Letitia ! It is all a mistake. I never, never was fond of him.”

“ And now when you might save him if you liked ! This has been such a blow to him. He would marry you to-morrow and take you away out of everybody's reach. The man that was really, really—oh, you won't deny it ! —the man of your heart.”

“ I do deny it ! Never, never ! I would not marry your brother Ralph if—if there was not another. I would marry nobody,” said Mary, raising her head, “ nobody—except the man I am going to marry ! ”

“ You will say you are in love with him next. A man that's older than your father—that has lived such a life, oh, such a life ! —all to humble us and bring us down to the ground—that have been so kind to you, treated you like a sister—and trusted you with everything, Mary.”

Mary knew very well that this was not true—but it is so difficult to contradict any one who asserts thus boldly that she has been kind. Perhaps Letitia meant to be kind. She could not have had any other notion—at least at first. But Mary could not be warm in her response. She said, “ It is misery to me to think of doing you any harm. I would not harm a hair of one of their heads—not for the world ! ”

“ No, you wouldn't stab them or give them poison—but you would do far worse, take everything from them—their whole living. You would change everything for us. I,” cried Letitia, tears coming into her voice as she realized the emancipation of

her once slave, "would not mind—for myself—I'm used to—putting up with things—for the sake of my family; but there is John—and little Duke—their inheritance taken from them that came from their ancestors—that they've always been brought up to—everything changed for them. And all because a friend—one we've been so kind to—my oldest friend, Mary, one brought into the family by me; oh, that is the worst of it! If it had not been for me you would never, never have known that there was such a person as Lord Frogmore. They've a right to say it's all my doing. Oh, Mary Hill, it was a fine thing for me to marry John Parke, and then to bring my friends with me into the family and ruin them all!"

Mary felt herself as obdurate and hard as the nether millstone. She folded her shoulders in her shawl and her mind in what she felt to be a determined ingratitude. Yes, she was ungrateful. They had been kind to her, but she would not give up her life for that. It was not fair to ask her. And how could she change when everything was settled? She turned her shoulder to her friend. "He said it should do them no harm—I told him I would not consent to do them any harm."

"Oh, as for that!" Letitia cried. She leaned down close, near to Mary's ear with her hand upon her shoulder. "Mary," she said, "you're my oldest friend. We used to play together, don't you recollect? It was you who was kind to me in those days. Sometimes I've seemed to forget, but I don't forget, Mary. It wouldn't have mattered if we had cut each other out as girls—that's natural: but now! You might win the day and welcome, get the title and go out of the room before me and all that—" Letitia's labouring bosom gave forth a sob at the dreadful possibility, but she went on. "But it is the others I am thinking of. It isn't me, Mary! And we that were always such friends."

There came from Mary's bosom an answering sob of excitement and misery, but she made no reply.

"I can understand, dear," said Letitia, putting her arm round the arched shoulders, "that now you have made up your mind to marry you don't feel as if you could give it up. I don't ask you to give it up—but, oh, think how far better than an old man like that, it would be to have one that was really fond of you, one of your own age, a person that was natural! Oh, Mary, hear me out. Father has settled to give him something, and we could

make out between us what would be quite a fortune in Australia. And he worships the very ground you tread on—and you were always fond of him you know, you know— Oh, Mary!"

"Don't you know that you're insulting me?" cried Mary, so miserable that to be angry was a relief to her. "Oh, take away your hand. Oh! go away and leave me. I won't listen to you any more."

"Mary, John told me to tell you that he had turned that insolent Saunders and all those horrid servants out of the house. He never even consulted me, and it's a dreadful inconvenience—every servant we had. But he turned them every one out of the house. You might be satisfied after that, to see how much we think of you. He said no one should ever be suffered to be insolent to you in our house. We have all esteemed you above everything, Mary. Insulting! Is it insulting to want you to marry my own brother—my favourite—and to make sacrifices that you should have something to marry on?"

"Letitia," said Mary, in her passion springing up from her seat, "so long as you talk of the children my heart's ready to break, and I don't know what to do—but you shall not put this scandal upon me. Oh! no, no. I won't bear it. It is an insult! Mother, don't let her come after me. I won't have it. I won't hear another word."

For Letitia, too, had risen to her feet. She stood staring for a moment while Mary pushed past her flying. But the fugitive had no more than reached the door when she was caught by the shriek of Mrs. Parke's valediction. "Mary Hill! If you go and do it after all I've said—oh! I hope you'll be miserable! I hope you'll be cursed for it—you and all belonging to you. I'll never forgive you—never, never, never! I hope if you have a child it'll be an idiot and kill you. I wish you were dead. I wish you would go mad. I wish the lightning might strike you. I wish—"

Letitia fell back in her chair, choking with rage and hatred; and Mary, like a hunted creature, with a cry of pain flew sobbing upstairs. The others looked on aghast, not knowing what to think or say.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHEN Lord Frogmore arrived at Grocombe Vicarage the day but one before his marriage, Mary was still so pale, so depressed

and nervous, that the brisk old bridegroom was much disturbed. It had been agreed in the family that it would be better to say nothing about that visit, which after all, though disagreeable, had done nobody any harm. This arrangement had been consented to by everybody, but Mrs. Hill and Agnes were always doubtful whether the vicar and Mary could keep their own counsel. And it turned out that these discreeter members of the family were right. For, indeed, Lord Frogmore had not spent an hour with his bride before he ascertained the cause of her low spirits and troubled looks. He was angry yet relieved.

"I had begun to think you had found out since I left you that you would not be happy with an old man," he said.

"Oh, Lord Frogmore!"

"It was a reasonable fear. You are a great deal younger than I am, though you think yourself so old, Mary. However, if it is only Mrs. John and the Dowager who have frightened you, it is to be hoped we may get over that."

Mary shivered but did not speak. It was her cold hanging about her still, her mother thought, but Lord Frogmore was not quite of that opinion.

"They must have said something very nasty to take such a hold upon you. What was it? Come now, Mary. You will not make me think worse of them (which is what you are afraid of) by anything you can tell me, and it will be a relief to you to get it out."

"It was—nothing particular," Mary said; but again a shudder ran through her. "It was just, I suppose, what people say when they are very angry."

"Come, Mary. What did she say?"

"Oh, Frogmore," cried Mary at last, "she could not mean it. You know she could not mean it. Poor Letitia! she is a mother, and they say a mother will do anything. I am sure she had no ill meaning. She said she hoped I would be cursed, that if I had a——oh, I can't, I can't repeat what she said. That she wished I were dead, or would go mad, or——No, no, she could not mean it. People don't curse you nowadays. It is too dreadful," Mary cried, and she shivered more and more, wrapping herself up in her shawl.

"The devil," cried Lord Frogmore. "The little fierce devil! A mother! She is no more a mother than a tigress is. She hates

you because after all her ill-treatment of you you will have the upper hand of her. And I hope you will take it and make her feel it too. What a woman for my poor brother John to have brought into the family! I can forgive his mother, who is as stupid as a figurehead, but would cut herself or any one else in little pieces if she thought it would be good for John; but not John's wife, the odious little shrew—the—”

“Oh, Frogmore,” cried Mary, “don't speak of her so. I can never forget how kind she was to me.”

“Kind to you—accepting all your time and care and affections and downright hard work, and giving you how much for them?—nothing. Now, Mary, there must be an end of this. She has made a slave of you for years. I hope you don't mean to let her make a victim of you at the end.”

“Oh, she could not mean it. I don't think she could mean it; but to curse me—just when every one, even the old women in the almshouses, send their blessing.”

Mary fell into a fit of shivering again, vainly wrapping herself in the shawl to restore warmth, and keeping with difficulty her teeth from chattering. The old lord was much disturbed by this sight. He tried to caress and soothe her into composure, but elicited little save a weeping apology. “Oh, I beg your pardon, Frogmore.”

“Mary,” he said at length, “I suppose we've both agreed as to the source from which blessings and curses come—or rather, let us say good fortune and bad, for I don't like to credit God with the curses, for my part.”

Mary, a little startled, looked at him with wide, open eyes, the tears, for the moment at least, arrested. She was not sure whether he was not about to say something profane, and, as a clergyman's daughter, she felt it her duty to be on her guard.

“Well,” said Lord Frogmore, “I shouldn't, for my part, think the people who call down curses were very likely to be heard up there—do you think so, my dear? If they are it is not in accordance with anything we know. Curses are only in use in romance books. And as for believing that Mrs. John has any credit in that quarter I don't, Mary. I'd back the old women in the almshouses against twenty Mrs. Johns.”

It was very profane—still it introduced a view of the subject

which proved, after a while, consolatory to Mary. She recognized reason in it. And the presence of the old lord, who was so cheerful and self-possessed, and was afraid of nobody, was also very supporting, as Mrs. Hill said. He had the confidence of a man who had always been accustomed to have his own way, and to be baulked by nobody, which is a great prop to the minds of people who have the persistent sensation due to the records and traditions of many failures that something is always likely to interpose between the cup and the lip. Lord Frogmore did not take any such contingency into consideration. When he found that Mary's cold was so obstinate he changed all his plans with the most lordly indifference to calculations and resolved to take her to the Riviera for what he had too much sense to call the honeymoon. "Moons," he said to Mr. Hill, "do not drop honey when the bridegroom is sixty-seven, but I hope to make it very pleasant to Mary for all that." And this was exactly what he did. The marriage and all the little fuss and excitement—for the parish was moved from one end to the other for the vicar's daughter and her wonderful match—shook her up and roused her spirits. And she wanted to do credit to the old lord, and would not have him carry off a bride with watery eyes and a red nose. So that even before they left Grocombe, Mary had recovered herself. She had few wedding presents, for her friends were not rich enough to send anything worthy of a lady who was going to be a viscountess. But there was one which moved her much, and amused the old lord. The family at the Hall had taken no notice of what was going on in the Vicarage—indeed it was so rough a man's house that the amenities of life were disregarded altogether. But the day before the wedding, Ralph Ravelstone, who had been known to be at home, but had showed very little, appeared at the Vicarage with a stable-boy behind him leading a colt. He went into the house, leaving this group at the gate, and paid his respects to the family, where he was received without enthusiasm.

"You see I've come back," he said.

"Yes, we heard you had come back," said Mrs. Hill.

"Mary would tell you. I'm rather put out about Mary. I always meant," said Ralph, "to marry her myself. Oh, I don't mind if Frogmore hears. He's a connection of mine and very jolly. I always meant to marry her myself."

"You showed your good taste, Mr. Ralph ; but I am glad that I was first in the field," said Lord Frogmore.

"That's what it is to have plenty of money," said Ralph, with a grave face. "You see, things on the other side didn't turn out as well as I expected. I've brought her a wedding present, though. He looks leggy at present, but he's a good sort. You wouldn't know his sire's name, perhaps, but it's well known in Yorkshire, and if he's well trained he'll make a horse. There he is at the gate. I don't say but he looks a bit leggy as he is now——"

"Oh, is it that foal? I am sure it was very kind of you, Ralph," said Mrs. Hill, in an extremely doubtful tone.

They had all gone to the window to look, and for a moment there had been some perplexity in the minds of the ladies as to which of the two animals visible was the wedding present—the half-grown stable boy or the neglected colt. Mary repeated, still more doubtfully, "I am sure it is very kind of you, Ralph," and there was a momentary pause of consternation. But this Lord Frogmore disposed of in his brisk way.

"We'll send him to the Park," he said, "where I don't doubt he'll be attended to ; and who knows what races you may not win with him, Mary? She shall run him under her own name. We'll make the Frogmore colours known on the turf, eh, my dear? Mr. Ravelstone has given you a most valuable present, and for my part I am very much obliged."

"Lord Frogmore always speaks up handsome," said Ralph. "I saw that the first moment we met at Tisch's little place. And that little shaver, don't you remember? By Jove, now he'll have his little nose put out of joint."

It was not perhaps a very elegant joke, and the ladies took no notice of it save by alarmed mutual glances between themselves. But Frogmore—the refined and polite little old gentleman: Frogmore, with his old-fashioned superiority in manners: Frogmore—laughed! There was no doubt of it—laughed and chuckled with satisfaction.

"Well," he said, "such things can't be helped. It's best in all circumstances not to count one's eggs before—— My brother John's family were, perhaps, what we may call a little cocksure."

"I don't know much about your brother," said Ralph. "But, lord, I shouldn't like to come in Tisch's way when she knows

Oh, she knows, does she? I'd just like to see her face when she reads it in the papers. Tisch is a fine one for pushing on in the world, but when she's roused——"

"Ralph," said Mrs. Hill, "you might be better employed than speaking against your sister. She has been very kind to Mary; and Lord Frogmore would never have met my daughter at all if it had not been in her house."

"That was all the worse for me, perhaps, Mrs. Hill," said Ralph.

"You are quite right, my dear lady," said Lord Frogmore. "We have all, I am sure, the greatest respect for Mrs. John. She has made my brother an excellent wife, and she has put me in the way of acquiring for myself a similar blessing." He made this little speech in his precise way, quite concluding the argument, and even quieting Ralph in a manner which much impressed the ladies. But the big bushman shook his head and his beard as he went away.

"That's all very well," he said, "but if Tisch has ever a chance to come in with a back-hander——" He went off, continuing to shake his head all the way.

Fortunately, Mary did not notice this, being diverted by the perplexity and embarrassment caused by Ralph's "leggy" gift, what to do with it, how to find accommodation for it in the little stable at the Vicarage, already occupied by an old and self-opinionated pony, very impatient of being interfered with. But Mrs. Hill and Agnes shook their heads too behind the bride's back. If Tisch ever had it in her power to do an ill-turn to Mary! Even all the excitement of the wedding preparations could not banish this thought from Mrs. Hill's mind. She impressed upon her other daughter the oft-repeated lesson that there is no light without an accompanying shadow. "In the course of nature," said the vicar's wife, "poor Mary will be left a widow to struggle for herself. It is true that the settlement is all we could desire—but if Tisch is at the back of it, her husband being the heir, how can we know what may happen?—and your father an old man, and I with so little experience in the ways of the world."

"But, mother," said Agnes, with hesitation, "Mary is not so old; she is only two years older than I am. She may have——"

"Oh, my dear! Heaven forbid there should be any family!" cried Mrs. Hill, lifting up her hands and eyes.

(To be continued.)

The Court of Joseph I. of Portugal.

IN TWO PARTS.

By BRITIFFE SKOTTOWE,
Author of "A SHORT HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT."

PART II.

THE MARQUIS OF POMBAL.

THE ministry of Sebastian de Carvalho, created Marquis of Pombal by his master, Joseph I., is really but a brief and transitory episode in the internal history of Portugal, and exercised comparatively little influence on the development of the country. The impression which it left upon the people, the institutions, the government, was deep, but evanescent. A trench dug in the sand of the sea-shore could not be filled up more quickly by the advancing tide than were the reforms of Pombal obliterated by the reaction which immediately succeeded him; and yet, in the opinion of the historians of the eighteenth century, it is this episode alone out of the hundred years of Portuguese annals which extend from the outbreak of the war of the Spanish Succession to the Peace of Amiens which is worthy to be ranked as a portion of European history. The rest is but a quarry for the national historian or biographer, a hunting-ground for the discovery of monstrosities, organic and inorganic, a fine field for the study of decay in all its forms, a fruitful subject for the moralist and a very formidable argument in the mouth of a Protestant polemist. It has little more bearing on the general course of European politics than the records of Sardinia and Corsica. Obscure states like the Duchies of Parma and Courland, the Khanate of the Crimea, the Bannat of Temesvar, or the Circle of Schwiebus, played a far more important part than the once-powerful and magnificent kingdom of Portugal. For them the mightiest kings of Europe staked their thrones on the hazard of the terrible game of war, and their transfer from one side to another marked a new phase in European history—the growth of some young and aspiring sovereignty at the expense of the older states and empires. Portugal, however, throughout the great struggles which deluged the border-lands of Europe with blood and carried fire and flame through half the great cities of the civilized world,

remained apart, sunk in inert slumber, and apparently unconscious of the roar of battle in her ears. Now and again it seemed as if she would in her helplessness fall a victim to the ambition of Spain. The protection of England, however, invariably sufficed to avert this danger before it had become sufficiently pressing to alarm the slumbering patriotism of the Portuguese. The attacks of the African corsairs were undoubtedly the greatest external annoyance to which the inhabitants of the Peninsula were exposed, but they could think of no more worthy way of defending themselves than by ordering general prayers and fasting throughout the churches. The success of this measure was exceedingly inadequate, and neither their sanctity nor their prayers were able to defend the members of the religious orders themselves, who were very frequently dragged off into slavery exactly as if they had been ordinary unprotected lay-people. Throughout the long agony, however, which the marine districts of Portugal underwent at the hands of these slave-hunting corsairs, their incursions never rose above the level of local filibustering expeditions. They never reached the dignity of a new irruption of fanatical Asia into Europe, nor could the feeble resistance offered by the victims be styled a new crusade to defend the outposts of Christendom against a fresh invasion of the Mussulman hordes. Portugal had neither an army nor navy suited for such a struggle. Her ships lay rotting in the harbours. The traditions and seamanship of Vasco de Gama and his fellows were forgotten. Her army was a disorderly mob, ill-clothed, ill-armed and worse paid. Nor was there sufficient concert of enterprise and concentration of force among the corsairs to render their attacks such a danger to Europe as to demand the interposition of a fresh league of the nations for the defence of the Cross.

Portugal stood outside the turbulent arena of general politics. Her grievances were local in origin and effect, her interests were narrow and degraded. Only during the ministry of Pombal was she really dragged into sympathy and communion with the hopes and aspirations of Europe, and it is highly characteristic of the complete isolation in which she was plunged that this contact with the other nations was mainly the result of what may be strictly described as an accident, was purely momentary and produced no lasting effect on the country. It was, in fact, solely due to Pombal's desire to complete the ruin of the Jesuits, whom he

had expelled from Portugal, by a bold measure of coercion applied to the Papacy, which he required the help of Europe to carry out. In his intercourse with the Duke de Choiseul, minister of Louis XV., and the Duke d'Aranda, minister of Charles III. of Spain, Pombal was actuated by no more widely extended scheme of policy. In fact, he definitely refused all proposals for alliances of a general character.

The character and policy of Pombal have been subjected to an immense amount of misunderstanding and misrepresentation. He has been claimed by one party as the champion of despotism and by the other as one of the most prominent disciples of the French philosophic school which was headed by Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau, and patronized by Frederic II. of Prussia and Catherine II. of Russia. He has been described as the incarnation of the reforming and humanitarian spirit, which as yet was dormant in the nations, but was soon to find loud-voiced expression in the French Revolution; he has also been denounced as the initiator of a reign of terror comparable to the worst excesses of unbridled democracy, and his measures of reform and methods of government have been paralleled to the system introduced by the Grand Duke Constantine into Poland, the completion of which was announced by the terse and terrible sentence, "Order reigns at Warsaw." In estimating the character and work of any statesman, however, it is usually the extreme views that are wrong, and no greater mistake can be committed than to treat the results of a career of power extending over thirty years as if every detail were part of a logically-arranged and rigidly-executed programme which had been evolved full-grown from the brain of its author at the moment when he first took upon himself the task of guiding the destinies of his country. Nor is any method of criticism more delusive than that which rests on the selection of some particular branch of an extensive policy, the construction of a fixed principle underlying it by the arbitrary rules of analogy and inference, and the deduction that this principle may be found equally underlying every other branch and is in fact the mainspring by which the entire machinery was set in motion.

The majority of writers, and especially the compilers of contemporary memoirs, have based their conclusions with regard to Pombal's achievements mainly on a partial consideration of that branch of them which more especially affected the Order of Jesus.

The advocates of the Order have been able to see in his measures nothing but the worst excesses of the freethinking and democratic spirit of the age, unduly set in the place of power by the folly and wickedness of a backsliding monarch, and using all the engines of despotism to effect the ruin of that ecclesiastical militia which had for more than two centuries proved itself the most determined and relentless opponents of heresy and free-thought in every form. The enemies of the Order, on the other hand, have attributed to Pombal a wise and enlightened vision of government, due to his sympathy with the philosophy of the French school, which enabled him to perceive very clearly that the presence of the Jesuits had been fatal to the prosperity of Portugal, that their influence was the most powerful obstacle to the establishment of order and good government, and that the ruin of the Order was at once necessary to the success of his own policy and would mark a distinct advance in the history of civilization. Both parties, in fact, are agreed that Pombal must be regarded as one of the most prominent disciples of the *philosophes*, and that the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portugal marks a victory in that country of philosophy over dogma and authority. It is therefore curious to find that the *philosophes* themselves did not regard Pombal as one of their disciples, nor did they esteem the expulsion of the Jesuits a triumph of philosophy. On the contrary, they regarded it merely as a triumph of despotism, and in their opinion, moreover, the cruelties and executions which accompanied it were worthy of the worst days of mediæval tyranny. It is also a remarkable fact that Pombal's colleagues in his labours for the suppression of the order were the despotisms of the House of Bourbon and the House of Austria, and that the two rulers who openly professed admiration for the *philosophes* and adhesion to their principles, namely, Catherine II. and Frederic II., extended protection and asylum to the Jesuits in their distress, and showed not the smallest sympathy with the movement which had been aroused through Western Europe against them.

It is, in fact, a most fatal error and a most formidable obstacle to the full comprehension of Pombal's policy and character, to regard his treatment of the Order of Jesus as anything but a branch of an elaborate scheme for the reorganization of the government of Portugal, or to esteem his concurrence in the international

movement for the destruction of the Order as anything but an accidental episode in his treatment of the national question—that is, as far as Portuguese internal history is concerned.

In a previous essay I have suggested that ever since the days of the annexation by Spain, Portugal had fallen helplessly from the high place which she had once occupied among the nations of the world. Her energies were stifled by the domineering government of Spain, her prosperity was ruined by the disastrous wars into which she was dragged, her principal market was destroyed by the revolt of the Netherlands, her soil was drained of men to fight the battles of Spain, and her people were oppressed by taxes in order to supply the cost of the huge armaments which were sent out again and again from the Spanish arsenals—usually to disaster and destruction. During this period the Jesuits acquired a firm footing in the country, and their influence was uniformly fatal to its prosperity. Their numbers and their establishments augmented largely year by year, until they had obtained possession of a very considerable portion of the soil of Portugal. Their privileges and powers grew at an equally rapid pace. They acquired gradually the complete direction of education, and they exercised a censorship over literature which very soon reduced it to the extreme of inanity. Utterly indifferent to all except the extension of their own domination over the superstitious feelings of mankind, they deliberately destroyed in the rising generations all germs of the spirit of enterprise, of inquiry, of independence, which they regarded as hostile to their influence, and by the blighting effect of this policy they completely ruined the nobler characteristics of the nation. It is a pitiable task to compare the great admirals and generals of the Renaissance period who divided the New World with Spain, with the puny race of spiritless devotees who succeeded them.

The influence of the Order of Jesus survived the revolution which broke off the supremacy of Spain. The outburst of patriotic energy, therefore, which had awakened the Portuguese from their inglorious slumbers was but short-lived. It had in fact done but half its work, and the omission was fatal to its continued life. Stagnation very soon reasserted its influence and reduced the nation to a state of isolated apathy, which was exactly calculated to strengthen the influence of the Order of Jesus and was absolutely fatal to all healthy life.

During the reign of John V., the father of Joseph I., the national life of Portugal reached the lowest possible ebb, and the heavy debt of vengeance owed by this unhappy nation to the Church of Rome was doubled or trebled. John himself was a despot of the type which we are accustomed to associate with the name of Louis XIV. during the second half of his reign, when the brilliance of his early triumphs was eclipsed by failure, famine and fanaticism. Without any of the greater qualities, John possessed all the vices and defects of Louis. His superstitious fears of the powers of the Church and the terrors of hell were only equalled by the unhesitating readiness with which he disregarded them daily to satisfy the cravings of his baser nature, and the lavish expenditure of money, prayers, and religious services by which he sought to atone for his repeated backslidings. Over such a nature the Jesuits were sure to obtain unbounded control. Their code of morality was admirably adapted to satisfy princes who found themselves in the awkward position of being wholly unable to abstain from sin, though they were horribly afraid of the threatened consequences of it. To such, the Jesuits were wont to hold out not merely reproof and exhortation, but also comfort and consolation, suggesting the infinite efficacy of pious undertakings and dispositions in the process of redemption. They had no desire to drive black sheep out of the Catholic fold, nor did they consider that because a man was unluckily a sinner there was any need to compel him to become a heretic as well. It seemed inevitable that John should live in a state of perpetual sin, but there was infinite consolation in the fact that the Church profited very largely indeed by his lapses from strict morality. The more cynical and calculating statesmen of the order no doubt saw the working of Providence, somewhat strangely disguised, in John's peccability, which bid fair to transfer in time the entire government of Portugal from the weak hands of man to the strong and infallible direction of the Church. So completely enslaved was John's mind by bigotry of the blindest type that it is only charitable to assume that his intellect had been affected by an apoplectic stroke which had fallen on him early in life.

His most remarkable achievement was the foundation, at the expense of nearly four millions, of the convent-palace at Mafra, in imitation of the Escorial, constructed by Philip II. The palace of Mafra was not built in the form of a gridiron, or any

other fantastic shape borrowed from the lives of the Saints, but it united in one edifice a palace, a church, and a convent, in exact parallel to the celebrated monument of the bigotry of Philip. The church occupied the centre ; one wing was devoted to the lodging of 300 lazy Franciscans, a monastic order distinguished for the disgusting filth of their habits and raiment ; the other wing formed the palace. John also created a patriarchate in Lisbon, and caused a hundred houses to be pulled down in order to furnish a site for a patriarchal church and palace. The civil government was placed under ecclesiastical control, and the Church made a fine harvest at the expense of the people. Among other extraordinary edicts issued during this *régime* was one which prohibited the importation of costly manufactures in gold, silver, silk and fine stuffs except for the use of the Church. In short, though John earned the title of *Fidelissimus* from Benedict XIV., it was at the expense of the complete betrayal and ruin of his country.

The weakness of his government was not only shown by the total decay of the army and navy and the attacks of the Algerine corsairs. The state of Lisbon was such that life and property were hardly secure after nightfall. There was no regular police for the defence of the inhabitants ; each was obliged to protect himself by his own prowess or that of his servants ; the streets at night swarmed with footpads whose aim was robbery and who thought little of murder. Perpetual scenes of violence occurred after dark, and frequently in the morning dead bodies, covered with wounds, were found in the public squares and thoroughfares.

Another result, moreover, of the period of stagnation and misgovernment which has been briefly sketched above, was the growth of the power of the nobles at the expense of the Crown. Enriched by immense grants of land in the vast countries of the New World, bound in the firmest alliance to the Church, the higher ranks of which were filled by their own relations, grown almost independent owing to the enfeeblement of the central authority, it is scarcely wonderful that their influence became the strongest obstacle to any re-establishment of the kingship or reform of the government, and that their interests urged them to resist by all means, fair or foul, the efforts of any king or minister who should attempt to put a limit to the misgovernment which had been their chiefest friend.

The three principal enemies, therefore, that Sebastian de Carvalho, better known by his later title of the Marquis of Pom-

bal (1750-1777), found arrayed in determined hostility to his plans for the complete reorganization of the governmental and social institutions of the country and the establishment of the authority of the king on the same despotic basis as that of the other rulers of Europe, were the nobles, the Church, and the spirit of social disorder which had grown rampant among the people. No sooner had he given the first indication of the policy which he proposed to pursue, than internece war was at once declared, and a struggle began in which it was obvious that one side or the other must be completely ruined. He could expect no mercy from his enemies. Had they proved victorious, he would have been doomed to death and infamy in this world, with the additional penalty of eternal punishment in the next. If, therefore, he meted out to his adversaries the measure which they would gladly have awarded to him, he is certainly not deserving of any special blame. Nay, he showed himself more merciful in action than they were in intention, for his interest in their fate ceased entirely at their deaths ; he made no pretence of regulating adversely their after-destiny. If, therefore, he filled the prisons with rebellious nobles and contumacious Jesuits, and erected gibbets by hundreds for the benefit of robbers and brigands, if his measures for the creation of a centralized monarchy were in many cases worthy of the Middle Ages rather than the eighteenth century, it must not be forgotten that the nation which he had to deal with was bigoted, sanguinary and vindictive, at best but half-civilized, and in many particulars at a less grade of culture than it had been two centuries before. It must also be remembered that Pombal was inspired neither by religious hatred nor philosophic enthusiasm in his attacks on the Church. He was a Catholic ; his bent of mind was purely despotic ; his sympathies were utterly opposed to those of the French *philosophes*. His policy was to exalt the monarchy and to reduce the Church and the nobles to their old subordinate position—in short, was that of our own Henrys and Edwards.

The struggle with the Jesuits began first in South America, where the order had established a settlement in the region known as Paraguay. Pombal arranged a very convenient settlement with the Government of Spain for the exchange of sundry disconnected districts in the New World which would have the effect of rounding off the territories of each kingdom and rectifying the frontiers. The Jesuits instigated their Indian converts to resist the execution of

this arrangement, and Pombal was obliged to send an army to quell this rebellion and enforce the stipulations of the treaty. The result was much bloodshed and a very considerable massacre of the Indian converts. Nor did the fathers themselves escape, for Pombal was well aware who were the true authors of the rebellion, and he not only imprisoned a large number of them but deprived them entirely of their lands in South America, and thus practically put an end to the domination which they had for so long exercised in Paraguay.

His policy was equally vigorous and uncompromising towards the nobles. At one stroke he revoked all the grants of land in the colonies which had been made to them at different times by the Crown. By this measure he reduced their power at least one-half and considerably impoverished a large number of them. It was only natural that this arbitrary decree should provoke considerable hostility, but all resistance was overborne by force, and the state prisons were filled with his opponents.

In 1755, while the war in Paraguay was as yet unfinished, and the first effervescence which had followed the rigorous policy which Pombal had initiated in Portugal was still at its height, a terrible earthquake, which bears a calamitous distinction even at the present day, shook the whole of Lisbon to its foundations and destroyed nearly 40,000 of the inhabitants. The first shock, which occurred at about ten in the morning, seemed to be horizontal in its direction, but the second, which followed in an hour, was vertical, throwing the pavement of the streets to the height of forty or fifty feet into the air and cracking whole rows of houses into fragments, as if they had been built of glass or earthenware. This frightful convulsion was accompanied by a sudden rise of the Tagus, up which a vast wave swept from the ocean on to the devoted city. To add to the horrors of the scene flames broke out in all directions where live coals had been hurled at random from the furnaces, and the conflagration spread even greater destruction than the earthquake. It was agreed by eye-witnesses that so much of the ruin and loss of life was due to the flood and the fire, that if the earthquake had taken place in the middle of the night, when the fires were usually extinguished and when the darkness would have prevented the greater part of the inhabitants from quitting their houses before daybreak, it is probable that not a fourth part of the lives would have been lost, nor would there have been so vast a destruction of property.

Fortunately for themselves the king, queen, and royal family were not in the massive stone palace at Lisbon during the earthquake, but were staying at their favourite country residence at Belem, which is about two miles lower down the Tagus, and on the same side of the river. Here the shock was felt but slightly and the house being a long low wooden structure, which yielded to the movement of the earth, did not suffer much. The royal apartments, moreover, being on the ground-floor, the king sprang out of the window of his chamber into the garden as soon as he perceived the shock, while the three princesses, who were in bed at the time, followed him, wrapped up in the bed-clothes. It was evident that the earthquake ran in a kind of vein, which passed right through the newer and more splendid portion of the town, sparing alike the Alfama, the old Moorish quarter, which had an infamous notoriety for filth and immorality, and the royal suburb of Belem.

To the horrors of fire, flood and earthquake were soon added those of brigandage and murder, and for several days the ruined city was in the hands of a mob of villains who availed themselves of the break-up of the entire social system to initiate a carnival of riot, outrage, and pillage, in which those who had been rendered homeless by the earthquake suffered horribly. The king was appalled at the disaster, in which he saw the hand of Providence. His minister, however, set himself to work to bury the dead and provide food for the living, to restore order and build great barracks of wood as temporary resting-places for the houseless. A cordon of guards was drawn round the city, and the streets were swept by vigilant patrols, who seized all who were unable to give a satisfactory account of themselves and hanged them there and then. From two to three hundred gibbets rose on the outskirts of Lisbon, each bearing an offering to the Goddess of Order. Food was brought in from the surrounding country and distributed to the starving. Operations were begun for clearing the streets and commencing the work of reconstruction. It was soon abundantly manifest that there was a hand of iron at the direction of the affairs of the country.

It may be easily imagined that the Jesuits did not hesitate to make political capital out of the earthquake. They declared that it was a direct manifestation of Divine wrath at the impious treatment which had been meted out to the Church, and they denounced Pombal as the Jonah for whose sake the capital had

been laid in ruins. It is probable that their denunciations would have influenced the superstitious king to dismiss his minister, had not the latter skilfully pointed out that Divine Providence had directly interposed in his favour and saved his house from destruction, when the palace of the patriarch and most of the convents and churches had been levelled to the ground. This argument convinced Joseph and determined him to give Pombal a free hand. To any one, however, gifted with the smallest sense of humour it would have seemed that a miracle which had also saved the vilest part of the town was probably not of divine origin.

Pombal took advantage of this triumph to carry out a series of sweeping measures for the reduction of the power of his enemies. He obtained the dismissal of the king's Jesuit confessor and forbade the members of the Order to approach the court without license. He abolished the annual *autos de fé*, abridged the powers of the Inquisition, forbidding that tribunal to summon any one for trial without the permission of the temporal power, and transferred the judgment of accused persons to the civil courts. These measures were as remarkable for their enlightenment as his methods of dealing with his opponents were barbarous and despotic. In 1757, moreover, he issued a general manifesto of accusation against the Order, denouncing its members as traitors on account of their conduct in Paraguay, and in the next year strict laws were passed forbidding them to engage in commerce and debarring them from the pulpit and confessional. In a skilfully-worded document he demanded from the Papacy their punishment for various violations of their vows, but the death of Benedict XIV. delayed the answer. In 1758, however, Pombal took advantage of the discovery of the Tavora conspiracy to strike more fatal blows at his enemies, clerical and lay. The Tavora conspiracy, as has been already stated, was directly due to his severe policy towards the nobles, and its failure enabled him to entirely extirpate two of the most powerful of the noble families —those of the Duke of Aveiro and Marquis of Tavora. He also accused the famous Italian Jesuit, Gabriel Malagrida, of having been an accessory and approver of the conspiracy, with which the latter was alleged to have become acquainted in his capacity of confessor to the Marchioness of Tavora, and imprisoned him in the subterranean casemates of the Castle of St. Julien, which guarded the northern shore of the mouth of the Tagus. This stroke was

followed by the seizure of a large number of members of the Order, and the dungeons of the Tower of Belem, the Castle of St. Julien, and the Fort Bougie, on the opposite shore of the Tagus, were soon filled with prisoners, many of whom remained in confinement until they were released by Joseph's successor. Finally a bill of indictment against the whole Order for complicity in the plot against the king's life was sent to Rome, with a request that Clement XIII. would issue a brief authorizing their degradation and punishment. Clement, however, very naturally hesitated to comply, and as the situation gradually became more tense Pombal first arrested some six hundred of the Jesuits and exported them to Italy, then confiscated all their property, completing his war of retaliation by breaking off diplomatic relations with Rome. The state-prisons, however, still remained full. Over a hundred prisoners were confined in the subterranean casemates of the Castle of St. Julien.

The New Despotism required a victim, and it found it in the person of Gabriel Malagrida. He appears to have been a harmless and imbecile fanatic, and there is not the smallest proof of his complicity in the Tavora plot. He was, moreover, an old man of seventy-five, and his age should have saved him from the extreme penalty. He was indicted, however, before the Inquisition for heresy, a charge to which his visionary views and absurd delusions lent some colour, but if this process had failed, Pombal had decided to arraign him at once before the civil courts on an accusation of high treason. His life, in short, was demanded by the government, and his condemnation by the Inquisition was followed immediately by his execution at the stake under the guise of an *auto de fé*. This harsh and unjust violence was regarded with general disapproval throughout Europe, while the illegality and hypocrisy of the proceedings excited universal disgust among all the enlightened men of the day. A strong line of demarcation had been drawn between the reforms proposed by the *philosophes* and those carried out by the New Despotism, and in the continued struggle between the allied despotisms of the Latin race and the Jesuits the sympathy of the disciples of the school of humanity and political freedom was with the persecuted Order rather than their oppressors. To the despotic rulers of France, Spain, Austria, Naples and Parma, however, the policy of Pombal commended itself most highly as admirably calculated to advance

the power of the Crown ; and to the united demands of this great league of sovereigns was eventually due the celebrated decree entitled *Dominus ac Redemptor Noster*, unwillingly issued by Pope Clement XIV., which declared the abolition of the Order.

The breaking down of the resistance which had hampered him at first, enabled Pombal to set on foot a variety of schemes which were calculated to largely benefit the country by improving the condition of the people and the Crown equally, by strengthening the governmental system and imparting fresh vigour to the army and navy. On this portion of his programme rests his claim to be considered a reformer, but he lacked the inspiration of the true reforming statesman. He did much for education by building free Latin schools, by instituting professorships of Greek, Logic and Rhetoric, by freeing the University of Coimbra from the narrow system of the Jesuits, and prescribing that the study of modern languages and philosophy should be an essential part of the new course. He established a school of commerce for the education of intending merchants, and converted the old arsenal at Lisbon into a technical college for the instruction of the poorer classes in useful trades and industries. On the other hand, however, his commercial policy was in many respects short-sighted and antiquated. He believed in the useful effects of monopolies, and his constant aim was to check the export of gold. In the cause of civilization his efforts were more successful—in no case more so, perhaps, than in the dissolution of all the monasteries and half the nunneries throughout Portugal, and the limitation of the earliest date at which a novice might be received into a religious society to the age of twenty-five. Side by side with these regulations may stand the laws which ordained that birth within the limits of Portugal or contact with the soil should in all cases confer freedom without regard to parentage, and the kindred edict which removed the disabilities of the converted Jews and their descendants. In dealing with the army and navy his efforts were less successful. It was impossible to transform a mob of tattered vagabonds, who were accustomed to beg their bread in the streets, into a highly disciplined and effective force ; nor could a navy be created out of an impoverished exchequer in a few years. Some slight degree of efficiency, however, was imparted to both, and if the work had been continued, more might have been effected. Not the least

important part of his work was the excellent order and the vigorous police which he established in Lisbon. Under his care, moreover, the city rose again in wide streets and handsome buildings, like a phoenix from its ashes, or like the new Rome of the Augustan age, which replaced the old republican city. Among the most conspicuous of the splendid structures with which the restored capital was adorned was a very fine college, in which Pombal designed that the children of the nobles should be educated in the way in which he would have them go.

It may easily be imagined that the severities with which his views were enforced did not gain him popularity. The Portuguese nation were far too ignorant and barbarous to comprehend the ultimate good which underlay so much of his work. They only felt that their dearest superstitions had been outraged, and that by this stern and determined minister their lives were valued as the snuff of a candle if they came across his path. Pombal, moreover, was not one of the highest *noblesse*, whose position marked them out quite naturally for power and royal favour. Though noble, he was not of illustrious birth, and his rise was solely due to the notice of Maria Anna, the queen of John, who recommended him to her son Joseph. He was therefore regarded as an intruder by the higher *noblesse* and an upstart by the people. He was the object of many assassination plots and attempts, and at last such danger visibly menaced his life that he deemed it advisable never to appear in public without an escort of guards.

In person he was tall and slender. His face was long and pale, of the type which we are accustomed to associate with the statesmen of the court of Philip II. of Spain. His eyes were keen and bright, his expression thoughtful and stern. To the close of his career, when he had reached the great age of seventy-five, his intellect remained at its highest vigour and his faculties were unimpaired. For nearly thirty years he wielded the rod of power in Portugal, and then his fall was sudden and ruinous. The death of Joseph in 1777 was followed by the accession of his eldest daughter, who had viewed with horror the attacks on the Jesuits. She hastened to disgrace the minister, to overthrow his system and recall his enemies. The latter came back thirsting for vengeance, and would have pursued Pombal to the death had not the court decided to protect him on account of his great age.

THE END.

A **Bomburg Beauty.**

A NOVEL.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD.

Author of "A CRACK COUNTY," "MATRON OR MAID," KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE MYSTERY OF A WOMAN'S HEART," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"OH! YOU BAD OLD MAN!"

To Hetty the four or five days succeeding Amelia's visit to her parents seemed like a dream. By some curious process they appeared robbed of all reality, and left no permanent impression on her memory. They were strangely quiet when contrasted with the eventful ones that had preceded them.

She possessed very little knowledge of the value of money, and would have been quite content with the modest allowance promised by her father had Karl appeared equally satisfied. But her strapping bridegroom was intensely disappointed at the result of Amelia's intervention on her friend's behalf, and took no pains whatever to conceal his sentiments in the presence of the poor little bride. They made her very unhappy, and every word that fell from his lips on their financial position went like a sharp knife into her heart. She was naturally extremely sensitive, and Karl's outspoken speech increased, instead of allaying, her constitutional timidity. She grew nervous, and told herself that he regarded his marriage as a failure, and already repented having run his head into the matrimonial halter. The mere thought was so inexpressibly painful that she could not give it utterance. And worse than all, the extra tenderness of Amelia's manner, and the pitying look which she fancied she saw in Mrs. Northcote's kind eyes, seemed mutely to confirm her suspicions.

The least approving word from Karl rendered her intensely happy. Then the blood would rush to her cheeks, and she felt a different creature. One day she put on a new frock which he had never seen before, and Karl happened to express his admiration both of the dress and of the wearer. When Hetty went to bed,

she kissed that frock out of sheer gratitude, for by its aid had she not appeared pleasing in her husband's eyes? Henceforth it was invested with a kind of sacredness.

Fortunately her mind was prevented in these days from dwelling too much on the estrangement that had taken place between herself and her parents. A torpor had stolen over it with regard to them. For the present, Karl occupied every faculty. After a family council had been held, it was arranged that the newly married pair should begin by occupying a small furnished flat. Karl knew the town well, and he, Hetty, Amelia, and Mrs. Northcote, went all over it in search of suitable lodgings. But they were hard to find; for although several very comfortable ones were to be had, they were either occupied, or else the rent was higher than our young couple could afford to give out of their exceedingly slender income. Unluckily for Hetty, she had never been brought up to understand household management. A great deal of money had been spent in teaching her to play and sing. She possessed the usual smattering of superficial accomplishments that passes muster as a sufficient education for young ladies destined to ornament genteel society. But in her new life they were not likely to prove of much service, and it would have been infinitely more useful to her had she known how to roll pastry, make cakes, and baste a leg of mutton.

For what can be harder on a poor ignorant girl, who has not even been taught how to order dinner, than to marry a man who thinks all the world of what he is going to eat, and considers meals the most important affairs in life? Joints are a perfect mystery to her—indeed, she hardly knows to what animals they belong—and with the price of butter, milk, eggs, and groceries she is utterly unacquainted. Anybody who chooses can cheat her. Instead of starting her married life on fair terms, and with a reasonable chance of not falling out with her lord through that sensitive portion of his body, his stomach, she is from the very beginning heavily handicapped and exposed to rebukes, if not squabbles, from which any sensible mother might have saved her. A young woman need be none the less a lady because she has received a practical education instead of a flimsy, meretricious one that is no good to herself nor to anybody else. The real lady is she who can turn her hand to anything, and whose intelligence masters difficulties instead of sinking under them.

At length, when our bride and bridegroom began to despair of finding rooms suitable to their limited means, Karl chanced to hear, through a compatriot, of a vacant flat in one of the square, detached houses facing the Schöne-Aussicht. Accompanied by the three ladies, he lost no time in inspecting it.

It consisted of a tiny dining and drawing-room opening out of each other, two bedrooms, a diminutive kitchen, and a wee box of a place intended for a maid-servant. They were on the second floor, and, although barely furnished, had the merit of being scrupulously clean. The view, too, was extended, looking over long strips of ripening corn with yellow heads bowed ready for the sickle, and white roads bordered by a green fringe of fruit and walnut trees. The whole place was so homelike that Hetty took to it at once, and loudly expressed her admiration. Whereupon Karl told her rather crossly to keep quiet, else the landlady was sure to raise the rent. This reprimand reduced her to a state of abject silence. She was always in a painful fear of displeasing him, and seemed to have an unfortunate knack of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. Karl was as perfect in her eyes as ever. She neither could nor would see any fault in him. All she felt was an increasing incapability on her part to realize the high standards and ideals of so noble a man. She was in that elementary, but not altogether happy, stage of love when a woman voluntarily piles all blame on to her own shoulders, and resolutely remains blind to any defects in the object of her adoration. Hetty blushed, and her lip trembled a little, but she said nothing. Her eyes rested on Karl with a mute, spaniel-like gaze which he seemed to resent.

Amelia felt sorry for her friend. This rebuff was the first she had received in public, and it was clear that Hetty attached undue significance to it.

"Never mind," she whispered ; "it's only Karl's way. He meant nothing by it, and you know money *is* of importance to you both."

"Yes, yes," said Hetty, turning hastily away and looking out of the window. "He is quite right—I never doubted that for a moment."

"You have done no harm," continued Amelia consolingly. "The landlady does not even understand English—so I am sure you need not mind."

But Hetty *did* mind. She could not help it. Even to be com-

passionated by Amelia was exquisitely painful and distressing. In great haste she wiped away a tear so that Karl should not see it. Karl hated tears. What could be more natural than for such a big, fine man to have a contempt for them? And then she smiled—a little, faint smile—and once more turned round and faced the company. Karl was quite restored to good humour, for matters were going well. The landlady, on being informed that Herr Von Kessler himself desired the rooms, and that he was prepared to take them for a permanency, after some bargaining, consented to accept the sum of forty-five pounds yearly for her apartments. Even this was a large amount out of the Von Kesslers' slender resources, particularly as several indispensable articles would have to be provided, but the rooms were the best they had seen at the price, and none were to be got cheaper, added to which, they were at liberty to enter them immediately, an important consideration in the present position of the young couple. So the bargain was concluded, much to Hetty's secret satisfaction, for she cherished an inward hope that when she once had her beloved Karl all to herself he would reappear in the same character of ardent lover which, during their brief courtship, had suited him so delightfully, and rendered her as a tool in his hands.

Circumstances had combined to cheat them of their honeymoon ; but surely, when once she was installed in a home of her own, she would taste some of its bliss. She might be stupid, but still she had brains enough to learn how to please him, and that should be her one study and endeavour. As she walked back to the Obere Promenade, her head full of such thoughts as these, a charmingly tender smile played round the corners of her sweet red mouth. If only Karl were kind to her, she regretted nothing. He more than filled the place of father and mother. Her simple yet tenacious nature did not crave after many loves. One true one satisfied all her aspirations. When Karl looked at her softly from out his great, clear eyes, it was just like a peep of Paradise. She felt transported and exalted. The world shone bright ; the sky knew no clouds. Once or twice her mother had accused her of extravagance. But now she was going to be, oh, so economical! She would not spend a single sixpence on herself. It would not signify how shabby she went, so long as Karl wanted for nothing. Nobody should have it in his power to say that he

had been dragged down by his marriage. Whatever love, pride, and self-sacrifice could do for a man, that she would do for him. In short, she was full of loving projects, in which Karl invariably figured as the principal personage. Ah! lucky idols on whom such a wealth of affection is bestowed. Why are ye only fashioned of wood and of stone? It is heart-rending to think of the waste of tender feeling that goes on in this world.

That night Hetty slept soundly for the first time since her marriage. The next day was spent in engaging a maid-of-all-work, able to clean, dust, cook, and sew. This did not prove easy, especially as, Hetty's German not being equal to the task of housekeeping, it was absolutely indispensable to find some one speaking fairly good English. After considerable difficulty a girl was secured at the moderate sum of eight pounds a year. But when Karl heard of it, he frowned and said there were plenty to be got for six pounds, and that Hetty must lose no time in improving her German if she would make two ends meet. In the discussion that arose, Mrs. Northcote stuck up for her young friend, and declared it was well worth while paying two pounds extra in order to have a servant capable of receiving instructions from and understanding her mistress.

All too soon the day arrived on which Hetty was to lose her kind protectors.

The fly which conveyed their luggage to the station was to take hers on afterwards to the Schöne-Aussicht, where Katinka had been installed since the previous day. With the three marks of which mention has already been made, Hetty purchased two pretty bouquets of roses to present to Mrs. Northcote and Amelia. Tears glistened in their eyes as they smelt the fragrant flowers.

"Oh, Hetty, dear," cried the elder lady, "you really should not have spent your money on us. Later on, poor child, you will find that you have little enough to spare." And so saying, she pressed into Hetty's hand a white envelope, on which was written, "Not to be opened until after we are gone."

"What is this?" inquired the girl in astonishment.

"Nothing, my dear. Only there is never any telling what may happen, and in case of a rainy day I want you to have a little trifle of your own on which to fall back."

"Oh! Mrs. Northcote," began Hetty, hurt by her want of con-

fidence in Karl, yet deeply touched, "I cannot——" She stopped short, and turning deadly pale, grasped Amelia tightly by the arm.

"Look!" she said hoarsely; "there are papa and mamma. What ever shall I do?"

"Go boldly up to them and beg their forgiveness," counselled Amelia. "At any rate, thank your father for having unbent so much as to make you an allowance, small as it is."

"Oh! I daren't, I daren't," said Hetty, cowering back. "It's all very well for you. You have never had to live with them, and are not afraid of them. I am." And she hid behind one of the iron pillars of the station.

"It will be your last chance," urged Amelia. "Mr. and Mrs. Davidson are evidently leaving by the same train as ourselves."

Hetty glanced timorously at her parents, who were standing close by, getting their luggage labelled. She encountered her father's eye. It was cold and pitiless, and rested upon her without the smallest gleam of recognition.

"Amelia," she said in a hollow voice, "it's no use my trying to speak to papa. He has seen me. He knows I am here, and—and," with a sudden sob, "he won't have anything to do with me."

Such was indeed the case. Even Amelia could not help seeing that both Mr. and Mrs. Davidson pointedly avoided their daughter. As already shown, she was by no means deficient in courage, and yielding to a sudden impulse, determined to make one last, desperate appeal on behalf of the poor girl-wife, who stood trembling and quivering like a culprit.

Therefore she went up to the old man—he looked very bent and infirm—and put her hand on his coat-sleeve.

"Do speak one word to her before you go," she pleaded, in soft vibrating tones. "She is so unhappy, and it is always better to forgive, even when we have been wronged. I am sure you will not regret it afterwards."

He shook her off quite roughly. The action roused her anger.

"Miss Dawkins," he said sternly, "this meeting is most unfortunate. No one is more aware of it than myself. I have not the least desire to cut either you or your aunt; please understand that; but I am compelled to treat you as strangers when I find you in the presence of Frau Von Kessler."

So saying, he gave his arm to his wife, walked hurriedly down the platform, and shut himself up in a first-class carriage. Amelia gazed after him indignantly. "Oh! you bad old man!" she said to herself. "You are wicked after all, and I was a fool to think otherwise or to give you credit for any feeling."

As accident would have it, aunt and niece were shown into the very next compartment to that occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Davidson. Hetty stood looking in at the window, exchanging last words with the friends who had been so kind to her, and struggling bravely against a painful stricture of the heart. The proximity of her parents somehow made good-bye harder than ever to say. Notwithstanding her love for Karl, all of a sudden she felt very lonely and forlorn. A kind of home-sickness stole upon her, accompanied by a secret dread of the future.

"You will come again next year," she repeated over and over again. "You will come again next year. That is a promise, remember."

"Yes, yes; we are not likely to forget," cried both ladies simultaneously, moved to pity by Hetty's twitching face. "The time will soon go."

Then the guard appeared, notched the tickets, and locked the doors. The last moments were rapidly approaching.

"Good-bye, my dear child," said Mrs. Northcote, imprinting a farewell kiss on Hetty's cheek. "May God preserve you."

"Good-bye, Hetty," called out Amelia. "You have my address, and if ever you are in trouble, or want for money, be sure and write to me. Don't let any false pride stand in the way."

"No, no," sobbed Hetty, fairly overcome by the kindness of strangers when compared with the treatment received from her own people. "I won't. But," she added, with a loyal return to Karl, "you both talk as if I were to be pitied, and I'm not—I'm not."

The engine gave a shrill whistle, the train creaked, and its strong wheels turned gently round. An overpowering impulse mastered Hetty's whole being. Cart ropes could not have held her back.

"Father," she cried wildly, running on to the carriage in advance, "oh! father, forgive me. We may never meet again."

He turned in his seat and looked her full in the face. His

upper lip trembled. Surely he was about to speak. The train increased its pace. She ran to the end of the platform. Here her progress was checked.

"Father," she called out, "don't be so cruel. Say one word to me, only one. I don't ask for more. Ah me, it is too late."

She said truly. His moment of softness was over, and for all answer he averted his head. With a sudden tenacity he stared at the long strips of cultivated ground, at the slender poplars rising like so many spires into the blue sky, and at the fantastically-shaped fruit trees, bending beneath their weight of sun-kissed fruit. At least a quarter of an hour went by before he altered his position. Then he looked round furtively, like a criminal, and said to his wife :

"Emma, has she gone?"

"Why, bless me," answered that amiable lady, "we have passed two stations. I spoke to you once, twice, three times, but you took no notice. Gone? Yes, of course she's gone, and I say, John, didn't she look bad! I never saw Hetty looking so pale and peaky. But there! she has brought it all on herself."

"Entirely," assented Mr. Davidson grimly. "Oblige me, Emma, by not talking about her any more. In future I never wish to hear Hetty's name mentioned."

"Lor'! John, that is carrying matters a little too far, isn't it?"

"I don't think so." He said the words in such a manner that even the wife of his bosom was awed into silence.

Vain restriction! He could not banish Hetty from his heart, nor drive from his memory the indelible impression made by a slight girlish form, clad in blue muslin, standing out frail and slender against the white-grey masonry of the station buildings. For many a week and many a month to come were the vibrating tones of that piteous young voice destined to ring in his ears, banishing sleep and defying repose.

As for Hetty, she walked sorrowfully back to the Schöne-Aussicht, and celebrated the inauguration of her new life by a passionate fit of weeping. She sobbed on and on, until the good-natured Katinka, happening to look in, was quite alarmed by the vehemence of her mistress's grief.

"No cry," she said, twitching nervously at Hetty's dress as if uncertain how her advances might be received. "No use cry. Friends all come back another year."

Hetty checked her tears and looked up. The little maid-servant's round, concerned face comforted her. She no longer felt so utterly forsaken and alone. Karl too! How miserably untrue she had been to him in feeling herself deserted when left to his tender mercies! Her conduct was that of a common traitor.

"Yes, Katinka," she said, with a struggling smile, "you are right. There is nothing to cry about. Herr Von Kessler will be in before long, and what would he say if he were to see these ugly red eyes?"

"He would say dey were de most lovely—de most exquisite eyes in de world," responded Katinka enthusiastically, for her mistress's beauty had completely won her soft heart.

At this Hetty laughed and looked quite cheerful, and Katinka laughed too. They were but a pair of children.

"You are a little goose, Katinka," she said, with a playful shake of the head.

"In many tings, yes," answered Katinka stoutly, "but not in tinking you an angel." Whereupon she fell on her knees and kissed Hetty's hand. She was very young, only seventeen, and this was her first place. Hetty kissed Katinka in return, and so between the girl-wife and her little handmaiden a firm friendship arose. Perhaps Hetty's conduct on this occasion was not exactly dignified; but she found her way to Katinka's heart much more surely than if it had been. She treated her like a human being, made of the same flesh and blood as herself, and thus bridged the gulf which exists between class and class.

"Have you got something nice for Herr Von Kessler's dinner?" she inquired presently. "He will be in soon."

"Come and see," responded Katinka with pride, for her culinary efforts had not been so frequent as to outgrow a feeling of triumph at their results. And then they both dived into the mite of a kitchen, where something that looked like a diminutive piece of meat was boiling in a pot, and hissing and spluttering away at a great rate.

"Beef!" said Katinka grandly, throwing in a pat of butter and some onion shreds.

"Ah!" returned Hetty, "that will do. Karl—I mean Herr Von Kessler—always likes beef. I'm glad we've got it to-day."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MARRIED LIFE.

IT was a great misfortune that Karl should have happened to come in exceedingly late for his dinner.

At two o'clock the beef was cooked to perfection—at least, so Katinka declared—and sent forth deliciously savoury fumes that pervaded every apartment in the little flat. But when Herr Von Kessler turned up at a quarter to three, truth compels the admission that it was done to a rag. Upon the metal cover being triumphantly removed by Katinka, the contents of the dish almost fell asunder. Karl did his best to carve the beef in slices, but it broke up into greyish shreds, which floated on a sea of watery gravy, smelling strongly of onion.

He bent his head down to his plate in a disapproving fashion. Hetty watched every look and gesture with increasing concern, and felt ready to sink under the table.

“What's this stuff?” he asked, tossing some of the shreds about disdainfully on the point of his knife.

“It's—beef,” she answered, almost inaudibly.

“Beef!” he exclaimed. “I declare I should not have known it. Never in my life have I seen anything so disgracefully overcooked. It's a perfect sin. There's no goodness left in the meat. One might just as well eat so much string.”

“You were late, Karl,” she ventured to remark. “If you remember, when you came to see me yesterday at the Obere Promenade, you said you wished to have dinner ready at two o'clock.”

“Ach! perhaps I did; all the same, that is no reason why Katinka should spoil my food. It's impossible for me to tell exactly when I can get away from the office. It depends entirely on what work there is to be done.”

“Poor Karl! Are you hungry?”

“Yes, of course. I'm always hungry. How could I be otherwise, when, unless I am dining out at somebody else's expense, I never get enough to eat? Look here, Hettchen,” he went on severely, “if this girl of yours can't cook any better, she'll have to go, English or no English.” And he brought his massive fist down on the table.

“But she's such a good creature, Karl, so nice and so anxious to please.”

"That does not signify, if she can't serve me up a decent dinner. Why don't you teach her, since she's evidently an ignoramus?"

Hetty hung her head. She felt overwhelmed by her own ignorance, and by a sudden sense of culpability.

"I—I am afraid, Karl, that I can't. I don't know very much myself, but," she added hurriedly, seeing a shadow pass over his face, "I mean to learn. Mrs. Northcote gave me a cookery book, and I hope soon to grow wiser."

"The sooner the better," he muttered, not very politely. Hetty overheard the remark, and flushed crimson.

All this time, in spite of his disapproval, Karl was making enormous inroads on the joint. It was at best a very small one, and as slice after slice kept disappearing, Hetty began to entertain serious doubts as to whether there would be enough left for Katinka's dinner. They had counted on cold meat for supper, but this luxury was evidently no longer possible. Hetty became nervous and uneasy.

"I—I think I'll put this piece back," she said, resolutely ignoring certain pangs of hunger. "You've given me too much."

"What! No appetite, Hettchen! That's not as it should be. We must send you to the Stahl-brunnen of a morning."

And so saying, down the voracious cavern of Karl's throat vanished the morsel which Hetty had hoped would go to swell Katinka's dinner.

At length Karl put down his knife and fork. There was only the tiniest little scrap of beef left on the dish.

"It's atrocious," he said, referring to the meat. "But one must eat. And now—what's coming next?"

Hetty changed countenance.

"Really," she said, "I—I don't know. In fact, I'm not quite certain that there's anything more coming."

"*Mein Liebchen*," he returned discontentedly, "how can you possibly expect a full-grown man to be content with such frugal fare? Ring the bell, or, better still, go and ask Katinka to bring in the next course."

Hetty rose at once to perform his bidding. It never appeared to strike him that in this new life, so different from the old, she too had difficulties with which to contend. As she went into the kitchen, her heart palpitated violently.

"Katinka," she said anxiously, "Herr Von Kessler has eaten

up nearly all the beef. I don't know what you will have for your dinner; and now he has sent me to ask if you have anything else ready."

"Yes, surely," responded Katinka, with a reassuring nod of the head, whereupon she produced from the oven a very hard and highly burnt rice pudding.

Hetty looked somewhat doubtful.

"Isn't it just—just a trifle too much done?" she inquired hesitatingly.

"Well perhaps so," acknowledged Katinka candidly. "But de inzide—it is good."

Unfortunately, Herr Von Kessler did not like rice pudding. He turned up his nose at it, and called it woman's stuff.

"Won't you try a little, Karl?" said Hetty, too hungry to be particular. "It's not as bad as it looks, especially if you add milk."

"No, certainly not. Here, Katinka," he called out, in his full bass voice, "bring me some cheese and biscuits."

The young housewives had not thought of supplying any. They glanced at each other with blank dismay.

Karl rose from the table, his temper greatly impaired. He looked upon himself as an injured individual.

"I see what it is," he said irritably: "if I am to have any dinner at all I must go out and get it. It's a nice thing for a man to come home and be starved."

"Oh, Karl!" exclaimed Hetty, in great distress. "Please do not say such dreadful things. You know how anxious I am to please you and to give you all we can afford. That piece of beef cost five marks, and I dared not spend any more; that's the honest truth."

"*Five marks!* Five marks, did you say? I never heard of such extravagance in my life. How do you suppose we shall make two ends meet if you don't know more about housekeeping than to give that sum for a joint of meat which I could eat at a sitting? At this rate, we shall be ruined in no time."

"Karl," she said humbly, her cheeks red with vexation, "you must forgive me a few mistakes. Perhaps I am very stupid, but everything is strange, and it will take me some little time to learn how to manage properly. But I mean to learn. Indeed, indeed I do. Only you must have patience, and not expect too much all at once."

"Five sevens," he went on, unheeding her words, "that's thirty-five, thirty-five marks a week, or, to make it clearer, one pound fifteen shillings of your English money, for our butcher's bill alone, without including bread, butter, groceries, or anything of that sort. We can't afford it, Hettchen. Just see what it would mount up to in a year!"

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, for matters had not yet presented themselves in this practical light. "I begin to understand. The best plan will be for you to give me a certain sum weekly for the housekeeping, and to keep all the money that remains."

"There won't be much over to keep," he said moodily. "That confounded old father of yours has taken precious good care of that. If he had only behaved decently, we might have been at the *Parc Hôtel* at this very moment, instead of in a miserable hole scarcely big enough to turn round in, and with not a sixpence between us to spend."

His tone and manner threw her back upon herself in a way which only a sensitive woman can realize.

"Karl," she said, with a certain gentle dignity which secretly irritated him, "if you don't mind, I would rather you did not abuse my father before me. After all, he *is* my father, and you and I have no business to discuss his faults. We may leave that to other people."

He coloured, being aware of the justice of the rebuke, yet for that very reason it incensed him the more.

"I shall say what I choose," he answered angrily. "It's not your place to dictate to me, or to give yourself airs."

"I don't want to give myself airs. Such a thing never entered my head."

"So much the better, for I'm master, and I mean to remain so. You may as well understand that fact once for all."

She looked at him with a pained, bewildered look in her lustrous eyes. It roused a sense of shame. He felt he had gone too far.

"What about my cheese?" he asked abruptly. "Has Katinka gone to fetch it?"

"No, you didn't give any orders, and at the present moment she is having her dinner."

"Lazy thing! These maidservants seem to me to think of nothing but their eating from morning till night."

"If you like," said Hetty, "I will go myself. At Herr Bernstein's, in the Luisen Strasse, I know they speak English."

"Yes, and charge you just about three times the proper amount. No, no, Hetty," trying to make up for his recent harshness; "it's the man's place to run errands, not the woman's. Besides, I can choose a cheese that I like, and you are sure to get the wrong sort. By the bye," he added awkwardly, "you don't happen to have any money about you, do you?"

"No, Karl, not a penny. I gave you the cheque this morning which came last night for my quarter's allowance. Ah! stop a bit; I had forgotten." So saying, she dived into her pocket, and bringing forth the envelope presented by Mrs. Northcote, and which until now she had forgotten, opened it. Out tumbled two crisp Bank of England notes for ten pounds each.

Karl's eyes sparkled at the sight. Was it possible that he had maligned Mr. Davidson?

"Where did you get those?" he asked eagerly.

"Mrs. Northcote gave them to me as a parting gift," responded Hetty.

"Oh! Mrs. Northcote!" he ejaculated, with a sudden subsidence of his hopes.

"She said I was to keep them for a rainy day, but, Karl, dear," murmured Hetty, looking up with shy enthusiasm into her husband's handsome face, "we will have no rainy days, will we? Now that we are together, they shall always be bright and beautiful, and so you must take one of these bank notes, as a wedding present from your wife."

"*Ach, mein Engel*" (my angel), he said. "You are too good! It will be robbing you."

Nevertheless, he accepted the note with great alacrity, and folded it carefully away in his pocket-book. If Hetty did not know the value of money, the same could scarcely be said of him. Poverty had taught him to have the highest regard for a commodity which he but rarely had in his possession. The pocket-book returned to its resting-place; he took Hetty in his arms and kissed her affectionately.

"*Liebchen*," he said, "you must not mind my rough soldier ways. I have been more used to camp life than to ladies' drawing-rooms, and, Hetty——" with a slight flush.

"Yes; Karl, what is it?"

"I can't help being a big man, and having a big appetite. It's not my fault."

She laughed a happy laugh, and laid her soft young cheek against his.

"I don't mind anything," she whispered, "if only you love me and will love me always."

A wandering lock of her auburn hair caressed his ear. Her little warm hands were round his throat ; and looking at her, he saw that she was wondrous fair, and not only fair, but loving and womanly into the bargain. Even without a dowry she still had charm.

"You dear little goose!" he exclaimed, with a sudden passion that sent a thrill of pleasure through her frame. "Of course, I love you. I shouldn't have married you if I hadn't."

"Oh, Karl, are you sure, quite sure? You're not saying it only to please me?"

"What an idea! And now I will just run out, buy the cheese, and finish dinner."

"And you do not really think I starve you?"

"No, no. It was only said in fun," taking up his hat and going to the door.

"Karl!" she called out after his receding form.

"Yes, Hettchen; what is it? Have you any commands?"

"You—you won't be long? I've seen nothing of you all day."

"Was there ever such a foolish little woman? No, I won't be away more than a few minutes, and when I come back, Hettchen, you shall put on your pretty frock—the one I like so much—and we will go together to the lawn-tennis ground."

"Oh, Karl, can't we go somewhere else, where we can be quiet and alone? There are always so many people there."

"Well," he said jestingly, "and if there are? Have I not a right to be proud of my beautiful wife, and to like to see her admired? Do you know, Hettchen, that without any vanity I really do believe you and I are what people call a handsome couple?" So saying, he folded her in another lordly embrace, and left her trembling with delight.

It really is wonderful what a ten-pound note will do, and in this nineteenth century of ours love has been pretty severely worsted by the golden guinea. The golden guinea reigns supreme, except amongst a few fond but foolish young persons

mostly belonging to the female sex. It represents comfort luxury, pleasure, ease, and so poor Cupid goes to the wall with his little bow, that can no longer plant arrows in the human heart. For now-a-days people must eat, dress, hurry here and there in search of amusement, and the good old-fashioned plan of a young man and a young woman each giving up something for the sake of the other is entirely out of date. They say, "I will not drag my Tommy or my Emmy down." The real thing is, they decline to make the smallest sacrifice. That is the truth, freed from certain fine wrappings given to concealing it, and robbed of spurious sentiment. The world of fashion is cold, and false, and heartless. Mammon rules it with a rod of iron. Poor Hetty was like a lamb newly escaped from the fold.

The news of Herr Von Kessler's marriage with the avowed beauty-girl of Homburg, her subsequent disownment by her parents, and her rejection of no less a person than Lord Charles Mountgard, had created quite a sensation among the English and American visitors. The elderly mammas blamed Hetty severely, though in their hearts they secretly rejoiced at her having been so idiotic as to refuse such a *parti* as his lordship. There was a chance for their girls still, so they told the sweet innocents by all means to have nothing to do with that dreadfully bold and forward person Frau Von Kessler, and, on the other hand, to be extra kind to poor dear Lord Charles. Some of the men, however, and more particularly the elderly ones given to romance, stuck up for Hetty, and called her "a real good sort." This, in modern phraseology, is equivalent to high praise. But whether the bride were to be dropped, or feted and admired as heretofore, depended much on His Serene Highness Prince Friskovitch. If he continued to show her favour, then there were many willing to follow suit. But should the Prince ignore Frau Von Kessler, most of the proper and right-feeling ladies in Homburg felt that the little English wife of a poverty-stricken German officer was not—well, you know, not *quite* in the same position as themselves. She might not be absolutely culpable, but she had thrown away her chances, and in polite society people who throw away their chances are not tolerated. They sink below society's cold, glittering surface. That is the punishment meted out to all persons foolish enough to make love-marriages on nothing a year. Such was the feminine verdict, which awaited

but the confirmation of His Serene Highness. Amongst the ladies a general sense of relief prevailed at what they termed Hetty's *mésalliance*. A pretty girl out of the way—so out of the way that she would never be heard of more—was a decided advantage to those still swelling the matrimonial market. Beauty, like everything else, has its penalty ; and all unknowingly Hetty had created a considerable amount of jealousy. Her promotion had been too quick to be easily forgiven by aspiring spinsters, who, year after year, came to Homburg animated by the secret hope of making Prince Friskovitch's acquaintance, and returned to their homes disappointed. Each, in her heart, was of course convinced that she was as pretty, as witty and amusing, as the favourite of the hour. Meanwhile the summers passed, and they did not grow younger, nor more charitable. Every season there was a little extra venom infused into their criticisms, and they became more lenient to the sterner sex, harsher to their own.

Luckily for Hetty, she was unconscious of the talk of the place, otherwise she would have felt overcome with shyness when, leaning on Karl's arm, she appeared for the first time in public as his bride.

Happiness had given the finishing touch to her beauty. A triumphant voice sang in her heart : "Karl loves me. Oh ! thank God, Karl loves me." And never had she looked so radiantly lovely. The very people in the streets turned and gazed after her.

It pleased Karl to find what notice she attracted. It raised him in his own esteem, and made him feel that, after all, he was an undoubtedly clever fellow in carrying off so fair a prize.

"Hettchen," he murmured, "how pretty you are. I am indeed a fortunate man."

She tightened her clasp on his arm. The colour on her cheek deepened, till her whole face was aglow.

"Oh ! Karl, do you really think so ? I can't tell you how happy you make me. I would rather be your wife than the Queen of England. There is nobody in the world like you."

Months afterwards she looked back to that hour with a passion of regret. Why was it so short ? Why did not its successors resemble it more nearly ? The birds sang, the summer wind just stirred the languorous leaves overhead, the sun shone like a golden disc in a vault of blue, and her happiness seemed complete.

The bubble glistened, and she had not yet learnt the bitter lesson that when she put forth her hand to seize it it would surely burst.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"LA PERLA!"

IN spite of his exalted position, His Serene Highness had a marvellous knack, whenever he stayed in a place, of knowing all that went on in it. He was like a sponge, and absorbed everything, from the highest diplomatic secret to the most frivolous piece of social gossip. It was this faculty that in all company lent him a special charm, for he never used his knowledge ill-naturedly. In fact, he made a point of doing gracious things. It was better policy to earn good words than bad, to win hearts rather than lose them, and in this respect his high birth gave him a natural advantage over Lord O'Banashee, of whose antecedents but little was known. That estimable nobleman was always for kicking away the ladder by which he had climbed directly he found it had grown too short to reach to the height of his ambition. Consequently he made a good many enemies, who took their revenge by laughing at him on all occasions.

Now it so happened that only this very morning the Prince and his satellite had been discussing the Von Kessler marriage.

"That little Davidson girl has quite done for herself," remarked his lordship, referring to Hetty. "Her parents have thrown her over, and gone away in a huff, and henceforth she'll just sink into a nobody. People are beginning to ask already if she is to be dropped or not. It's a trifle awkward for the first few days, *mais que voulez-vous?*"

"Poor little devil!" exclaimed the Prince, with a slight yawn. "If a woman's pretty, it don't make much difference whether she be a *grande dame* or a *grisette*. They are equally delightful to my mind. All the same, I wonder what made Miss Davidson marry that good-for-nothing fellow Von Kessler. One can understand his motives, but not hers. She had everything to lose, and nothing to gain."

"Do young ladies pause to consider that when they fancy themselves in love?" asked Lord O'Banashee, with a sneer.

"If report says truly, she might have been Lady Charles Mountgard," observed His Serene Highness.

"And now," responded the worthy nobleman, "every one is wondering if they will cut her or not. Such are the ups and downs of life." He himself had quite decided in his own mind that no object could be attained in future by continuing Hetty's acquaintance. A pretty girl is always deserving of consideration. The chance of a good marriage cannot be overlooked, but a beautiful woman mated to a beggar sooner or later must become a nonentity if she cares for her husband and refuses to overleap the bounds of propriety.

"Cut her!" repeated the Prince indignantly, whose exalted station placed him above such reasoning. "Why on earth should any one want to cut poor little Frau Von Kessler? She is perfectly respectable; not that that matters much now-a-days."

"Her misfortune is greater than loss of character, sir," said Lord O'Banashee, with pompous gravity. "She is poor."

The Prince looked at his companion disdainfully.

"Ah! of course; now I understand. We all know that in the nineteenth century there is no crime comparable to poverty."

"Quite so," assented Lord O'Banashee, through whose thick hide sarcasm seldom penetrated. "In refusing to marry Lord Charles Mountgard, and in running off with a penniless German officer, Frau Von Kessler has simply made a fool of herself, and society is wise to protest against such an act of madness."

The Prince rose from the seat on which he was seated, and took two or three strides up and down the room.

"Yes," he said, "you are right, and no doubt Frau Von Kessler has thrown away an excellent chance of advancement. She has been foolish enough to fall head over ears in love with a man and to sacrifice everything for his sake. Does it ever strike you, my worthy friend, that you and I are also fools when we make mock love to mock ladies, who empty our pockets and care for us only on account of what they can get? I tell you, O'Banashee, I like that little girl and honour her folly—a folly of which we are no longer capable. Life has robbed us of a good many illusions, but it is pretty to see them in other people; and as long as I remain in Homburg I shall make a point of befriending Frau Von Kessler. It won't hurt me, and it may help her with nice disinterested people like yourself, whose hearts are large, and overflowing with the milk of human kindness."

Lord O'Banashee scarcely appreciated the highly moral tone

which his companion chose to employ. It created an uneasy conviction that the Prince was fully conscious of all his petty meannesses and despised them thoroughly, in spite of the outward cordiality of his manner. He gave a wriggle and felt very much like a worm. The next words relieved him.

"Have we got any one coming to dinner to-night?" asked His Serene Highness. He said "we," but, as a matter of fact, the entertainment was Lord O'Banashee's.

"Mrs. Crown-Shuffer is coming, sir," answered Lord O'Banashee. "I asked her, according to your wish, and Mademoiselle La Perla from Frankfort. It is an off-night at the theatre."

"Ah! La Perla!" exclaimed Prince Friskovitch, with every sign of lively satisfaction. "I shall be delighted to renew my acquaintance, and look forward to a pleasant evening. Thank goodness! she speaks no English, and so she and Mrs. Crown-Shuffer can't fall out, even if they would. The ladies are very trying at times, and it's not by any means an easy task always to keep the peace. They're so infernally jealous of each other."

"Sex, sir, sex," said Lord O'Banashee. "What else can you expect? Besides, just look at the competition."

"We are dining on the Terrace, are we not?" asked His Serene Highness, pursuing a different train of thought.

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. If we should happen to meet Herr and Frau Von Kessler at the lawn-tennis ground this afternoon we will invite them also."

Lord O'Banashee murmured an obsequious assent. He was clever enough to take his cue from his master, quite irrespective of individual private opinion. Since it was evident that for the next few days Hetty was likely to continue in favour, he would smile on her as usual, and not let her see how greatly she had fallen in his estimation. He would set such a noble example of friendship as must inevitably display to full advantage the constancy and disinterestedness of his nature. If His Serene Highness had requested him to invite a bushwoman, he would have been equally ready to perform the royal bidding. No wonder royalty deigned to smile on this veritable slave of the ring!

Meantime, unconscious of the honour in store, Karl and Hetty stood side by side and watched the lawn-tennis. An unusually exciting game happened to be going on, for Renshaw was playing

single-handed against two opponents. They were no mean foes, and the play on either side called forth much commendation from the spectators.

Hetty was so interested that she had not noticed how one or two of her acquaintances purposely looked another way when she approached them.

After a while the Prince appeared, as he often did when any good match was being played, for though German by birth, he was English in most of his tastes, and a thorough sportsman. Directly his quick eye caught sight of the Von Kesslers he went up to them and shook hands with extra cordiality. Then, in a voice louder than was absolutely necessary, he asked the young couple to dine with him that evening on the Terrace.

Hetty looked at Karl, and the mighty bridegroom, blushing red with pleasure, joyfully accepted the invitation.

Prince Friskovitch stood chatting affably to Hetty for a few minutes longer, and then took possession of his seat.

"Poor little soul!" he said to himself. "I've put her all right with this set of snobs, at any rate. How pretty she is, to be sure! With that hair and those eyes, if she only knew how to talk, she'd have every man in Homburg at her feet. And yet," stifling a sigh, "she is nicer as she is."

No sooner had the Prince taken leave of the Von Kesslers than there was quite a little stir on the bench near which they were standing.

Old Lady Gusher, with her three plain daughters, suddenly found her eyesight, and came rushing up to Hetty post-haste.

"How do you do, my dear?" she said effusively. "So glad to see you—so glad—so glad," wringing Hetty's hand in a perfect convulsion of friendship.

"So glad—so glad—so glad!" echoed Jane, Maria, and Mary Anne.

"You are very kind," said Hetty, a trifle taken aback by the warmth and vigour of the attack.

"Not at all—not at all. Don't mention it," returned Lady Gusher. "And so you are actually married, you pretty, naughty little puss! Oh, don't blush! I heard all about it. Will you introduce me to your husband? I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance."

Karl made a low bow and took off his hat with a flourish. He

certainly looked very imposing, and so the old lady seemed to think, for she smiled at him with her faded eyes, and arranged her bonnet-strings quite coquettishly.

"Ah!" she went on, once more addressing Hetty, "you ran away, did you? Secret marriage, and all that sort of thing. Heavens! how romantic. Not," remembering the presence of her innocent daughters, "that I should altogether approve of my girls acting in a similar manner. In a general way I think parents ought to be consulted; but I can well understand, my dear, that in your case," bestowing another affectionate glance on Karl, "there were extenuating circumstances." Then she put up her gold eyeglass, took critical stock of him from top to toe, and murmured audibly: "A splendid man! Yes, really the finest man I have seen for a long time."

Both Hetty and Karl overheard the remark, as it was intended they should, and were pleased by Lady Gusher's expression of opinion—he because he had his share of masculine vanity; she because to hear him praised was exquisite joy.

"And you are actually going to dine with the Prince to-night?" rattled on her ladyship, who had been a grocer's daughter. "What an honour, to be sure! After that, I suppose, it's perfectly useless small people like myself venturing to ask for the pleasure of your society at dinner?"

"On the contrary," said Karl, "we shall be only too happy."

"Do you really mean what you say? That is indeed kind. What day will suit you to favour poor me?"

"To-morrow, if you like," answered Karl, who was not in the least particular as to his company so long as he got a good dinner.

"To-morrow it shall be, then. I will write and let you know the hour. By the bye, what an extremely pleasant person His Serene Highness seems! I never saw any one with such charming manners." Lady Gusher was dying to make the Prince's acquaintance, and to entertain people who had dined with royalty only the previous night seemed like getting a little nearer to the sun. For the next hour or so she could go about saying, "Ah, yes, the Von Kesslers. A most charming young couple. They are the Prince's guests to-night, and to-morrow they are coming to me."

That sounded well, and when they became a trifle more intimate, why should not her new friends introduce her and dear Jane, Maria, and Mary Anne to the great man himself? Through the little

lady's scheming head passed a variety of projects as she stood, smiling and chattering, like a weather-beaten sparrow, ready to pounce on the smallest sustenance.

She was not the only one who showered civility on the newly married couple now that it was clearly determined which way the wind blew. In fact, Hetty and Karl had quite a triumphant progress, and between his friends and hers received invitations every night for a week. They walked back to the Schöne-Aussicht in excellent spirits.

"Karl," said Hetty banteringly, "I shan't have to buy any more beef for ever so long. If we have a good dinner at night, we can manage with a cold luncheon of bread and cheese in the middle of the day, and then I can save enough out of the housekeeping money to buy you that pair of new boots you were saying you wanted so badly."

He laughed.

"Ah! thank God, no more beef and onions for a whole week. That alone is something to look forward to. See what it is, Hettchen, to have a pretty wife. The men all admire her, and the women are civil to her on account of the men. As for His Serene Highness, he was quite charming this afternoon. Nothing could have been kinder or more gracious than his manner. If you make yourself agreeable to him to-night, who knows but what he might get me appointed Master of the Kursaal, with a salary of five thousand marks. He has a great deal of interest in high places."

"Five thousand marks! Oh! Karl, then we should be quite rich, and could turn Katinka into the housemaid, and get a better cook, who could give you nice little dinners, such as no doubt you are accustomed to eating."

Thus happily discussing their future plans, they reached home dressed themselves in their best, and sallied forth for the banquet of the evening.

Directly it was known on the Terrace that they belonged to Prince Friskovitch's party, the greatest attention was shown them. They were conducted to a table, ornamented with lovely bouquets of yellow roses, and partially screened from the public gaze by a paper Japanese screen, rendered beautiful by a profusion of pink flowers and wonderful green leaves of a bright arsenical colour. Being a trifle early, Hetty and Karl stood about until the Prince

arrived. Before long they were joined by a somewhat remarkable-looking lady, to whom Karl took off his hat with a flourish. He did not, however, introduce her to his wife.

"Who is that?" whispered Hetty, struck by the new-comer's bright red cheeks, her restless black eyes, and bold showy style of beauty. "Is she a friend of yours?"

"Not exactly a friend, but an acquaintance," he responded, trying to conceal some slight embarrassment. "The lady is the celebrated Mademoiselle La Perla, of the Theatre Royal, Frankfurt, of whom you must surely have heard."

"No," said Hetty innocently. "Is she very famous?"

"You know nothing. Why, La Perla is the finest burlesque actress in the world. She sings the naughtiest songs, and has the prettiest leg of any woman on our modern stage. Of course she is famous."

"Oh! Karl!" said Hetty, very much shocked, and feeling the blood mount up into her face, for the heartiness of his praise displeased her. "Surely she is not going to dine with us?"

"Well, yes, I think so. At all events, it looks very much like it. Report says that His Serene Highness is an immense admirer of Mademoiselle La Perla."

"I did not know that princes asked actresses to dinner," returned Hetty coldly—"at least actresses of this type."

"Bah! don't be so squeamish. Let me tell you this too, you little goose: an actress who can sing a song and dance a breakdown like La Perla has every crowned head in Europe at her feet. She is simply divine."

Hetty looked seriously at the object of Karl's admiration, but could see nothing attractive in his divinity. She was fat, coarse, common. Her face was covered with a thick layer of *blanc de perle*, and there were a good many things about her which were evidently not her own. Her colour was borrowed, and so was her hair.

Meanwhile Mademoiselle La Perla was making wicked lightnings of her great, heavy-lidded eyes, that were adorned by two dark rims. She darted alluring glances at the handsome officer, who, it appeared, had already the honour of her acquaintance. They drew him to her side, as a needle to a magnet. Her flashy beauty for the moment quite put his wife's into the shade. Before long they commenced a conversation in German, of which

Hetty could only understand a word here and there. Seeing them laughing and chatting so gaily, a feeling of isolation—or was it jealousy?—began to steal over her.

It was not pleasant to find how much better Karl seemed to amuse himself with another woman than with her. No doubt these actresses both did and said what they liked. If gentlemen enjoyed that style of thing, ladies could not attempt to compete with the seductive sirens without lowering their womanhood altogether. Some such thoughts dimly passed through Hetty's mind as she watched Karl's broad back shake, and heard the light laughter of his companion. Fortunately she was prevented from analyzing her sensations by the arrival of Prince Friskovitch and party. A general bowing, curtseying, and hand-shaking now took place. The waiters swarmed around like so many gnats, and in a very few minutes the company sat down to table. When Hetty recovered sufficiently from her shyness to use her eyes, she found that in her character of bride the place of honour had been assigned to her. She occupied the chair on His Serene Highness's right. La Perla was on his left; beyond her came Karl; and, with a little nervous flush, Hetty recognized Mrs. Crown-Shuffer just opposite, talking to Lord O'Banashee, but at the Prince. Well, she was not the least of a prude, and hated being termed one, but she could not help feeling that the two ladies whom she had been asked to meet were scarcely such as she should have selected. Three or four strange gentlemen completed the party. And it was wonderful what a merry entertainment it proved.

All ceremony was dispensed with, and as cork after cork flew the buzz of conversation became louder; light peals of laughter in feminine notes, and gruff, bass applause in manly ones, grew more and more frequent. In fact, the fun was uproarious. Prince Friskovitch, of course, was charming as usual. Little by little, however, La Perla engrossed his entire attention. That witty, bright, amusing lady chattered away quite at her ease. She, the sovereign of the stage, recognized no superior. She treated the Prince *en bon camarade*, and when the dessert was on the table, began humming snatches of such funny, naughty songs, that every man present became convulsed.

Mrs. Crown-Shuffer was nowhere. She looked daggers at her brilliant rival, whose impudence even exceeded her own; but La Perla only rolled her black eyes and did not care a pin. What

did the scowls of one malicious woman matter when she had all the men on her side? She laughed openly in Mrs. Crown-Shuffer's face, and in such a droll, disdainful manner, that the Prince could not help laughing also, and then, of course, everybody else followed suit; everybody, that is to say, but Hetty. She felt utterly bewildered, and oh! so stupid, amongst this brilliant, light-hearted company, whose only aim in life seemed to be pleasure, eating and drinking.

Her thoughts were of Karl, and of Karl alone. She would far rather have spent the evening with him in their little sitting-room, if only he had been willing. But the dual solitude which was so dear to her apparently bored him. He liked society. Perhaps that was natural, since he was formed to adorn it. Thus thinking, she leant forward, and glanced at her husband. Her heart was very tender. Suddenly it contracted with a throb of pain. Karl's face was flushed; his eyes shone. She could not help seeing that he drank a great deal of wine, and paid most unnecessary attention to his fair companion whenever the Prince gave him a chance. La Perla flirted with both indiscriminately, and conferred her favours with an amiable impartiality. They were very jolly and very noisy, and Hetty felt terribly out of place. She would have given anything to have been able to slip away unnoticed, and reach the haven of her own quiet little home.

When dinner came to an end, coffee was called for, and both ladies and gentlemen lit up cigarettes. She did not smoke, and therefore refused the Prince's polite offer of a fragrant Khedive.

"You are in love, Frau Von Kessler," he said to her, with a smile. "It is easy to see that."

She blushed to the roots of her hair, then turning her glorious eyes on his, said timidly:

"Is love a thing to be ashamed of, sir?"

Her innocence and simplicity touched a chord in that spacious organ which represented his heart.

"No," he answered, "certainly not. But what I want to know is—how long will it last?"

"Last!" cried Hetty, indignant at any doubt as to the stability of her affection. "It will last for ever."

His Serene Highness glanced at Karl, who just then was whispering confidentially into La Perla's ear.

"Ah!" said the Prince. "In that case your husband is a very lucky fellow—luckier than he deserves."

Hetty's eyes involuntarily followed the direction of her companion's. She saw Karl bend down and fasten La Perla's bracelet on the round, white arm which she so coquettishly held out towards him.

A sensation of faintness came over her, a sudden loathing of all this loud laughing and jesting. She felt as if her finer and better feelings were being rasped, and subjected to a blunting process. This sort of thing might suit some women, but it didn't suit her. She sat quite silent and, if the truth must be told, very unhappy, until the party broke up. La Perla had to catch a train back to Frankfort in order to attend a rehearsal early the next morning. This brought the festivities to a somewhat early close.

The Kursaal gardens were illuminated by a brilliant moon which outshone artificial light. Her pure rays poured down upon the Terrace, with its moving crowd of men and women, and lit up the huge, shadowy trees with a ghostly radiance. The dark blue heavens were perfectly serene; no cloud obscured their surface. The charm of night rested upon the gardens. It was quite light, and yet, as the newly wedded pair descended a flight of stone steps that led into the street, Karl stumbled and almost fell.

"Take care," said Hetty in alarm, and she drew his great hand through her arm. It was very hot. She could feel its pulses throbbing through the thin sleeve of her dress, and his eyes had a queer, wild look in them. As they walked along, he sang quite loudly snatches of a song which La Perla had hummed during dinner. Hetty recognized the melody without difficulty, for it was a peculiarly striking one. At first she did not speak, but by-and-by she gathered sufficient courage to put a question she had been wanting to ask all the evening.

"Karl," she said at length, timidly and with visible effort, "was not—was not that a very funny party?"

"Ach! Himmel!" he answered, and she wondered at the unsteadiness of his voice. "It w-wash the nicesht b-barty I have ever been at."

"Oh, Karl! How can you say so? I thought it simply horrid."

"You are a goosh! What a woman La Perla ish, to be s-shure!"

"I call her an odious creature," said Hetty, more indignantly than prudently.

"T-thatsh because you're jealous. It w-won't do, though—I won't sh-tand it. So there!"

His wife made no reply. She scorned to do so. She would not let him see how cruelly he had hurt her. Only from that night a barrier seemed to rise up between them. The perfect sympathy which alone can render the marriage of a man and a woman wholly happy was wanting. Much as she loved her Karl, she could not unfold her heart to him. She had tried, and he had thrown her back upon herself rudely, almost roughly. Already the poor little bride was gaining experience, but the price she paid for it was heavy. It made her cheeks pale and her eyes dim as she helped her lord and master up the narrow stairs of their little lodging, and left him loudly calling for beer.

No, assuredly Lady Gusher need not have envied Hetty. There are drawbacks even to dining with royalty. Those same dear lords will drink more than is wise, and worship at other shrines, and their wives are subject to heartache.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FALL OF THE CARD-CASTLE.

THE fine weather came to an end. Day after day visitors were carried away by the train, and towards the third week in September Homburg was forsaken by all save its accustomed residents. The little town, which only a short time ago had been so gay, swarming with beauty and fashion, now presented a very dreary and desolate appearance. The park was empty. Its magnificent trees, decked in autumnal tints, stretched gaunt arms to the clouding sky. After their short but severe season of toil, the nymphs of the Wells had returned to their usual avocations ; whilst all the booths and many of the principal shops were closed.

But to Hetty these changes did not signify. She was hard at work, conscientiously striving to learn her duties as housekeeper, and to acquire a more intimate knowledge of the German language. In the latter she soon made rapid progress, devoting most of her spare time to it. Directly she had mastered a sufficient number of necessary sentences, she was to be seen

sallying forth every morning, basket on arm, going a-marketing in the good, old-fashioned style. After a while, she grew quite expert, and ended by being able to drive a bargain almost as well as Katinka herself. It did not take her long to discover that the strictest economy was indispensable if she would make the sum allowed by Karl cover their weekly expenses. His never-failing appetite proved a constant source of outlay, and, if the truth must be told, of apprehension. There were days when apparently nothing could satisfy it, and for the sake of the ex-chequer Hetty could not help wishing sometimes that he ate a trifle less heartily. To counterbalance Karl's marvellous capacity for food, she deprived herself of proper sustenance, scarcely tasted a morsel of meat, took bread and potatoes instead, they being comparatively cheap, and whenever she felt desperately hungry, which was no uncommon occurrence, resorted to weak tea in order to stay the pangs of unsatisfied nature. Consequently she lost strength, just, too, at a time when she most required it. "We cannot both have all we want," she would soliloquize. "One of us must do without, and it is better for me than for him."

Acting on this spirit of sacrifice, she grew quite thin and pinched-looking. Her face began to lose its youthful bloom, and her eyes shone out with an unnatural brightness, dwarfing every other feature. Now and again they wore almost a wolfish expression, for the fact was that, in her unselfish efforts to secure Karl's comforts, the poor thing was starved. Literally she did not get enough to eat to keep her body properly nourished.

All through the winter she tried resolutely to believe that she was happy; but a mutinous voice in her heart, at first timidly, afterwards more and more loudly, proclaimed the contrary. Passionately she sought to steel her mind against the belief that Karl's love was superficial—nay worse, evanescent. She endeavoured not to see that very shortly after their marriage he had wearied of her. But the fight was vain. Strive as she might, she knew she could not keep him content by her side. Her smiles, her tenderness, were thrown away. Apparently she failed in the precious art of being able to amuse her husband, and inducing a condition of good-humour. He accepted her devotion as a matter of course, yet it touched no answering chord; and according to his mood he treated her either with contempt or indifference. Both were equally hard to bear. After a morn-

ing spent in most anxious preparations, and much personal fatigue on her part, he would come in to dinner, grumble at each dish, although he ate up their entire contents, then throw himself on the sofa, and out of sheer idleness and *ennui* fall asleep, only to wake up an hour or two later on and growl more loudly than before. Well, this was married life in one phase, but it certainly was not the blissful state which Hetty had pictured to herself during the short days of their courtship.

Daily she felt with increasing force that, as regarded Karl, she was a matrimonial failure. She did not please him; she could not satisfy him; and he never neglected an opportunity of giving her to understand that she had completely ruined his prospects. The unfairness of the accusation was patent; nevertheless it left a sting.

All this was very sad, and very painful to a loving young woman who had quarrelled irrevocably with her parents for the sake of a man who pretended to worship her as long as he believed her to be rich, and openly twitted her with her poverty when he discovered she had no money. It was unkind; it was ungenerous to a degree. Nothing but bitter experience could have made her believe Karl capable of such conduct. She did not want to think hardly of him, but she saw now that his motive in marrying her had been purely mercenary. Added to this great inward hurt from which Hetty suffered, other causes tended to increase the depression that during the winter settled on her like a cloud. Karl constantly left home, sometimes for one night, sometimes for a longer period. He stated that he had business at Frankfort which required his presence, and on each of these occasions he came to Hetty and asked her to lend him some money. When she demurred, pleading the poverty of her finances, he grew so cross and abusive that in the end she was forced to comply with the demand. True, she could only spare a few marks, but he took them eagerly, never giving a thought to the extra privations their loss entailed on the two poor women at home. Such things were beneath a man's knowledge. Once, and once only, Hetty ventured to remonstrate, and to point out his extravagance.

"Karl," she said, "is it absolutely necessary for you to go to Frankfort so often? The railway journey is expensive, and costs more than we can afford."

"Business," he rejoined airily. "Business must be attended to."

"Oh! of course. But is business never going to bring in anything? The fact is, Karl, we are running into debt, and," she added, with a swift, hot blush, "there are reasons why we should be extra careful." For towards the beginning of May she expected to become a mother.

"All right," he said testily. "Don't preach. That won't mend matters, and you can't expect me to live week after week in this dull place, without ever seeing a soul. If we are hard up for money, write to your parents, and inform that stingy old father of yours of your condition. Perhaps that may draw him, and soften his paternal heart."

There was a frank brutality about this speech which made Hetty wince. The flush deepened on her cheek.

"I would rather die than write a begging-letter to my father," she said spiritedly.

"What nonsense! You must put your pride in your pocket."

"Supposing I had already done so?"

"Eh? What was that you were saying?" he rejoined eagerly.

"When the weather turned cold at the beginning of the winter," she said, "I had literally nothing to wear. All my warm dresses and jackets were at home. I thought of them lying idle there in the drawers, and then something—I don't know what it was—induced me in a foolish moment to send a line to my mother, telling her of my destitute state, and begging her to let me have my old clothes. I was an idiot," concluded Hetty bitterly, "for to that letter there came no answer. And now I would rather starve in the streets, than ask another favour of them."

Karl's countenance grew dark during this confession.

"I never knew any one mismanage matters as you do," he said irritably. "It seems to me you haven't an atom of tact. Clothes, indeed! As if they signified! Now if you had worked upon the old people's feelings, talked about the dear little angel likely to be born into the world and wanting the commonest necessities, it would have been a different story altogether. Then we might have had a chance; but you have muddled it as usual."

Hetty's eyes filled with tears. Experience had taught her the futility of argument. Angry words burnt on her lips, but she suppressed them, and left the room, hoping thus to preserve peace. But a sense of injustice was strong upon her. If she were always in the wrong, why did he not stay at home more,

and help her to do right? Now things had come to such a pass between them, that in order not to quarrel she took refuge in flight. Alas, alas for her dreams of connubial happiness! One by one they were melting away like a mirage, leaving a cruel blankness behind. What a pitiful shipwreck of faith and hope, and all that made life worth the living! And ever the fierce, unsatisfied longing in her heart grew sharper, until it filled her whole being with gnawing pain. For she cared for him. That was the worst part of it. Her love was as strong as ever, in spite of his faults, which she could not help seeing. It would have been better for her had she grown callous and indifferent, but hers was too sensitive a nature to harden quickly.

Karl's frequent absences were a source of constant disquietude, although she did not suspect his fidelity, being too pure and innocent herself to harbour evil thoughts of another. As to the future it occasioned a vague uneasiness. Up till now money had proved so scarce that she had been unable to make any preparation for her approaching confinement. As the time drew nearer she felt an unconquerable loneliness and fear. At first she had looked forward with delight to having a little son or daughter who might inherit Karl's beauty and splendid shape; but latterly this sentiment had begun to give place to one of huge pity for the unborn infant. What if its father did not take to it, and refused to make some small sacrifice for its sake? After the first few months, another mouth to feed would greatly increase their expenditure, and even how to clothe the child was a terrible perplexity. Hetty had not the courage to confide her anxieties to Karl. Firstly, he appeared to take no interest in them and shuffled all responsibility from his shoulders on to hers; and secondly, whenever she made the attempt, he always returned the same answer, "Apply to your parents."

Fortunately she had one or two good friends, who were extremely kind to her. Amongst them was an old gentleman, one Sir Archibald MacIntyre by name, who lived nearly all the year round in Homburg on account of his health. Sir Archibald had from the very first taken an immense fancy to the beautiful, lonely young wife, whom he sincerely pitied. His experienced eyes saw pretty clearly what was going on, and all his manhood and chivalry were aroused on Hetty's behalf. He was a simple, kindly old man, and although she never complained, he knew that her heart

was full of sorrow. And often when Karl was away he would make up a little friendly dinner-party at his comfortable house on the Promenade, and invite Hetty on purpose that she might not sit brooding alone at home.

‘Poor thing,’ he murmured to himself. ‘She sadly looks as if she wanted a good meal. My belief is, it’s a perfect charity to give her one.’

Under the influence of a little kindness and consideration, Hetty would brighten up like a nipped flower cheered by the sun’s rays, and talk so sweetly and unaffectedly to Sir Archibald that he became her devoted servant.

‘My dear,’ he said to her once, laying his trembling hand on her auburn head, and looking at her with tender, compassionate eyes, ‘you are far away from your own people and friends. If ever you want help, come to me. I am an old fellow with one foot in the grave, and my friendship need not make your husband jealous. I claim the privilege of age.’

‘Oh!’ began Hetty, succumbing to a sudden spasm of bitter emotion. ‘It will not make him jealous. He does not care enough about me for th——’ Then, conscious of an unwise disclosure, she stopped short, and dropped her eyes in confusion. An awkward pause ensued.

Sir Archibald was the first to break it.

‘All right,’ he said a trifle huskily, patting her on the back. ‘Don’t say any more. I understand.’

They never, in all their conversations, alluded to the subject again; but from that day Hetty was aware if ever she wanted a friend she should find one in him. And forsaken as she felt, the knowledge brought some comfort.

It was the end of April. The sky was chequered with beautiful white clouds, that rose like solid marble into the pure blue depth of ether that represented infinite space. The birds, fluttering, hopping, pecking, were sending forth a perfect rage of song. Green grasses pushed up their pointed blades from the brown earth, white-leaved daisies gleamed star-like in their midst, tall buttercups on slender stems nodded their golden heads to the breeze, and everywhere tender young buds were uncurling themselves in the sunshine, filling the air with a fresh, delicious fragrance. The pulse of nature throbbed with a glad, new life, which thrust winter cold into the distant past. The very atmo-

sphere was permeated by growth and promise. They infused vitality into every living thing. It was good to be young ; it was good to be alive, it was good even to be capable of *feeling* in such weather. So at least thought Hetty, whilst the unborn babe leapt responsive to the mother's mood.

Nevertheless, it had been a morning of vexation. Karl had taken himself off to Frankfort, vowing that urgent business rendered his presence there indispensable. As usual, before departing he applied to his wife for money, which she, poor thing, could ill afford to give ; for, needless to say, he never repaid the loan. Left to her own devices, she sat down and indulged in the luxury of a good cry ; but the fresh spring day and the clear yellow sunshine had an irresistible influence on her spirits, and after a while she yielded to their cheering effects. They tempted her out into the Park, where the lime trees were beginning to show a tender sprinkling of green. She tired easily now, and could not walk far, so she went into the Palm-house near the Elizabethan Spring, and rested herself on a bench. At right angles to this bench, and separated from it by a huge, prickly-leaved cactus, there was another seat, the two forming a sharp corner, although their occupants remained invisible to each other. Hetty's nervous temperament became soothed by a strong physical congeniality as the sun's warm rays poured down upon her from the glass roof overhead. The moist heat of the conservatory lulled her senses, and produced a feeling of animal well-being, delicious in its drowsy repose.

Presently there came two elderly ladies of her acquaintance, who, passing by without seeing her, seated themselves on the vacant bench. They were kindly, garrulous old souls, but Hetty was in no mood for light gossip, and rejoiced that the fleshy cactus leaves formed such an effectual screen. The monotonous sound of their voices almost sent her to sleep, but by-and-by she was aroused by hearing her own name mentioned. She sat up with a start, and listened.

"That poor little Frau Von Kessler," said the first speaker, "how I do pity her. Such a disgraceful *liaison*, and it's getting to be the common talk of the town ; and yet I hear she is totally ignorant of all that goes on."

"It's a public scandal," answered her companion. "Every one but his wife appears aware of the fact that he is madly in love

with Mademoiselle La Perla, and spends all his time running into Frankfort after her. My son Gustave knows the lady, and met Herr Von Kessler there last week. It was then arranged that he—not Gustave, I mean, but Von Kessler—should escort the impudent hussy to Madame Arnoldsen's recital, which takes place this afternoon in Frankfort, and which it seems La Perla was most anxious to be present at. And they do say—" Here she whispered a mysterious confidence into her companion's ear, which Hetty did not catch.

"No!" exclaimed that lady indignantly. "Not really? Is it as bad as all that? Dear, oh dear, I wonder what the world's coming to. Almost directly after the time his wife is expecting her baby, too! Was there ever anything so abominable?"

"It's true, nevertheless. I have it on the best authority that that is the reason why Mademoiselle La Perla has announced her intention of taking a two or three months' rest from the stage very shortly."

Hetty heard no more. A curious buzzing came into her ears, that resembled the sound of gigantic mill-wheels going round and round at a frightful velocity. She grew quite dizzy, and everything appeared unreal and confused. When she came to herself the two ladies had taken their departure, ignorant of the tortured listener sitting so quietly behind the cactus plant. Karl false! Karl La Perla's lover! Ah! now she saw it all, and understood the deceit which for weeks and months he had been practising. This man, her husband, had taken her sorely needed money, and robbed her of the commonest necessities of life, in order that he might run after another woman. And such a woman! A coarse, low, brazen actress. If Karl really cared for Mademoiselle La Perla, then the gulf between them must indeed be wide.

As link by link the chain of evidence against him appeared stronger and more complete, something seemed to go snap within her, leaving a great and cruel void. In a frenzy of despair she tottered to her feet, and pulled out her watch. For days past Madame Arnoldsen's recital had been advertised all over Homburg. It did not begin until seven o'clock, and now it wanted a few minutes to three. At four an afternoon train started for Frankfort. She would catch it, go to the entertainment, and with her own eyes seek out the guilty couple. Once let her see them together, and the truth would be revealed. A

woman situated as she was leaps at it by instinct, not pausing for circumstantial detail.

Alas for Hetty's plans! She had no money. That very morning she had given Karl the last mark she possessed.

What mockery her starving and pinching to let him go and court La Perla! The thought set her whole being afire, kindling it with passionate jealousy. If her rival had stood before her at that moment, she felt capable of murder. A tiger-like longing for destruction was upon her. She was no longer a loving, long-suffering wife, but an outraged woman, burning to avenge her wrongs. A single impulse dominated every other: "I must and shall go to Frankfort."

That was the cry of her heart—a cry impossible to stifle or subdue. But how? Without money she was undone.

All of a sudden she remembered Sir Archibald's kind promise of help. Ah! now was her time of need—the time which his considerate speech had seemed ominously to prophesy. She flew rather than walked towards his house, and burst in upon the quiet old gentleman without even waiting to be announced.

"Sir Archibald," she said breathlessly, being far too agitated to beat about the bush, "you once said that in case of any difficulty arising I might apply to you. I take you at your word. I want particularly to go to Madame Arnoldsen's recital to-day in Frankfort, but," she went on, turning very red, "I haven't any money, and must ask you to pay for me. If you will come with me so much the better."

Sir Archibald pushed up his spectacles on to his high mild forehead, and looked at her with an air of grave concern. Her eyes were feverishly bright, a hectic spot of colour burnt on both cheeks, her lips were parted, and their corners drooped pathetically. He could make a pretty shrewd guess what was the matter, but for her sake he thought it wiser to pretend entire ignorance.

"What has happened to upset you, my dear?" he inquired, in his gentlest tone.

She wrung her hands.

"Oh, please—*please* don't ask any questions. I don't wish to appear rude or ungrateful, but I can't answer them. I have heard something—but I don't know. After all it may not be true."

"We will hope not," he said gravely.

"Dear Sir Archibald," she went on, looking up into his face

with wild, despairing eyes, "you have been very good to me, and it seems to me now as if you were the only friend I had got."

"Tut! tut!" he responded, flourishing a silk pocket-handkerchief and blowing his nose, "that's all nonsense."

"Will you trust me enough to take me into Frankfort without wanting to learn the reason?"

"Of course I will. I should be a mean hound if I didn't." So saying, Sir Archibald jumped up and fetched his hat and great-coat. Then he hesitated, and, with a quaver in his honest old voice, added :

"But, my poor dear little girl, I am afraid you are going on a sad journey."

Hetty flushed crimson. The odious scandal was true. He, too, knew that Karl was in love with Mademoiselle La Perla. The two ladies had been right when they had said that it was the common talk of the town. Was there ever misery and humiliation to equal hers? It turned her hot with shame, then left her cold and chill.

"It can't be helped," she said sadly. "I must find out the truth, no matter how great the pain may be."

Sir Archibald put his hand on her shoulder. The commiseration of the action made her heart swell.

"Poor child!" he said. "You are so young to experience such unhappiness. I only wish I could render your life bright for you, as it ought to be. Will you not take an old fellow's word and believe him when he tells you that there are some things in this wicked world of ours which it is better for loving women never to find out?"

She shook her head.

"Rest on the borderland of doubt," he continued. "Certainty often is still more cruel."

His words carried a terrible conviction. The advice was good, but knowing what she did, how could she act upon it?

"No," she said, and her voice broke, giving way to a smothered sob. "I can't rest. It's impossible."

Sir Archibald gave up further efforts at dissuasion. He put on his hat, and twenty minutes later they were whirling past the flat open country on their way to Frankfort. Hetty stared vacantly out of the window, and her companion, with delicate tact, made no attempt to break the silence.

(To be concluded.)

The Last Race.

By A. D'ARCY HILDYARD.

Author of "VERRA THE OPERA DANCER."

ONE evening in spring some officers were assembled round the mess-room fire in the cavalry barracks in Dublin. It had been a guest night, but all the company had left with the exception of one gentleman, whose black coat and general bearing pointed him out as not belonging to "the service."

He was standing at a table with a small note-book in his hand, in which he quickly entered some bets he had made on the garrison races, which were to come off next day.

As he did so he called out to an officer who stood near the fire, "St. George, won't you risk a pony on the hurdle race to-morrow?"

"No," replied the officer addressed, "I never bet on my own horse; I only run him to give the regiment an interest in the race." So saying, Mr. St. George walked out of the mess-room, followed by a glance by no means amiable from the civilian.

The latter was a gentleman of good family and fortune in Galway, who was known as the boldest rider and best judge of horseflesh in that sporting county. Both of which qualifications caused him to be regarded with immense respect by his young military friends, who listened greedily to the words of wisdom, on stable matters, which fell from his lips.

Not that the squire, as he was called, cared at all to keep his superior knowledge to himself; he was always good-natured in giving his opinion when asked to do so, and consequently was very popular with all the young officers, with the exception of St. George.

That gentleman had a decided antipathy to the "horsey squire," to whom he was a contrast in every way. Kerwan was dark and middle-sized, with loud off-hand manners; St. George was tall, fair, and had a quiet unapproachable manner, which always caused the former to feel at a disadvantage. But another reason contributed to the squire's feeling of irritation. A certain young lady, a Miss Fraser, whom he intensely admired, showed

a decided preference for St. George's society, and avoided his attentions, although he was very rich and the soldier was poor.

Mrs. Fraser and her two daughters lived in a handsome house of their own, but they had but a small income, and Kerwan had flattered himself that either of the young ladies would gladly accept him. He had at first paid considerable attention to the eldest girl, but latterly transferred his admiration to her pretty young sister, much to the annoyance of both girls, the elder of whom looked on him as an eligible *parti*, while her sister thought him an intolerable bore.

The day of the races was bright and pleasant, an immense crowd assembled on the course. The good folk of Dublin are keen lovers of sport and turned out to a man, their female belongings being glad to have a day's outing, military bands and luncheon tents being highly attractive in their eyes.

Mrs. Fraser and her daughters also betook themselves to the races, the eldest girl fully intending to win back her quondam admirer, her sister being quite as determined to get rid of him.

The squire soon arrived. He was splendidly mounted and in high spirits, having just heard that the hussars were ordered on service.

He hoped that St. George would love and ride away in "orthodox military fashion," or—oh! happy chance—he might be shot! He knew that the gallant hussar had the reputation of being a lady killer of the first water, and he fondly hoped he was only amusing himself—but he hated him all the same.

It must be acknowledged that there were good grounds for the accusation hitherto. As to St. George's flirting propensities, the handsome soldier would ask a fair one to waltz as if the happiness of his life depended on that particular dance, and when the regiment got the "route" and brought their flirtation to a sudden close, he would say "adieu" with the air of a martyr going to the stake, a demeanour which intensely delighted his brother officers, who thought his conquests a feather in the regimental cap.

As the squire now saw him ride past, in full racing costume, looking every inch the perfection of a gentleman rider, and marked the bright smiles with which Maria Fraser greeted him, he felt furious.

Setting spurs to his horse, he cleared a high fence near in such

splendid style as to elicit the admiration of the bystanders. "Well done, squire ; it's yourself can do it !" shouted one ; "Galway for ever !" roared another, and amid a chorus of compliments from his admirers the squire galloped off.

But just then the racers were rushing up, and he only reached the winning-post in time to see St. George make a good finish, and win the race.

That evening the squire returned to his hotel in a detestable humour, and instead of the jovial laugh that usually announced his arrival he maintained a gloomy silence. Indeed, his man assured the society in the servants' hall "that he really must resign his office if that Galway feller did not use more polite langwidge."

But Mr. Kerwan, however angry he might be, was not a man easily discouraged. He believed very much in the power of perseverance, and next morning he called at Mrs. Fraser's house to offer her a box at the opera, and he was tolerably sure she would invite him to escort them there.

The page who opened the door said the ladies were out, but on being presented with a half-crown remembered they would soon return, and asked him to walk up to the drawing-room. The polite youth, having shown him upstairs, stole out to spend the money, and Kerwan remained quietly waiting until the young ladies or their mamma returned.

The folding doors of the room were closed, and he soon heard the sisters come home and run upstairs into the next room. They were speaking of a dance to which they had gone the previous evening, and at which St. George had not put in an appearance.

The squire was quite close to the door, and did not lose one word of their conversation.

He heard Miss Fraser say, "Really, Maria, you should try not to look so woebegone—people will remark it ; and, besides, I am certain Mr. St. George fully intended going to the dance. Something has prevented his doing so."

"If he wished to go, he would have been there," replied poor Maria ; "I fear he does not really care for me, and is only amusing himself. Unless he comes this evening I shall be sure of it. I told him we would be at home, so we shall see."

Kerwan had heard enough, and determined to leave the house

quietly, so that the girls might not suspect he had overheard their conversation. Placing the opera tickets on the table he stole down into the hall, and in another moment was in the street, without having been seen by any of the family.

How he wished that something might occur to keep St. George away this evening! Maria might then perhaps favourably contrast his devotion with the soldier's indifference. He knew that St. George had been unexpectedly prevented going to the dance by being obliged to take another officer's duty, and there was a chance of his having to do so again this day. So he resolved to go to the barracks and find out, under pretext of a visit to Mr. Neville, who had asked him to inquire about a hunter he was anxious to purchase.

Just at this moment a drag drove up with that young warrior on the box, who hailed the squire and drew up with a crash. They were going to hear a celebrated choir at St. Patrick's Church. Would he come? He at once joined the party, among whom was St. George.

After the service, as they were looking at the curious old building, the sexton inquired if they would like to see the crypt. On their assenting, he lit a torch and they descended into the vaults.

Young Neville soon declared he had had enough of it, and ran up the steps, followed by all his companions except St. George, who was looking at an inscription at the far end of the crypt.

As Kerwan turned and looked back at the soldierly figure of the hussar, the diabolical idea occurred to him to keep his dangerous rival out of the way for that evening.

In an instant he pushed the heavy door of the vault, which shut with a loud bang, leaving the poor young officer in semi-darkness, and a prisoner.

The rest of the party went gaily back to their quarters without having observed the absence of their friend.

Half frightened and half exultant at what he had done, Kerwan returned to his hotel, and lost no time in presenting himself at Mrs. Fraser's tea-table, where he was cordially welcomed by that lady and her eldest daughter, but scarcely noticed by Maria.

That young lady employed herself by standing on the balcony, watching the hall door, and listening to every footstep in the street.

As the squire stealthily observed her anxious and preoccupied

air, he thought with grim satisfaction that she would not see St. George enter the house that evening at all events.

Thinking it was now time to release his prisoner, Kerwan excused himself for leaving so early, and bade the ladies good-night. As he left the house he looked up at the drawing-room windows ; the lamps shone out brightly, and he could hear Miss Fraser singing, but Maria was leaning motionless over the balcony, and gazing sorrowfully down the street.

Kerwan turned angrily away, and hailing a cab drove to the sexton's house, which was close to the church. He intended to get the old man to open the door of the vault under the pretext of having lost a pocket-book, which he thought he must have dropped in the crypt, and which he wished to search for immediately. He knocked long and loudly at the door, but no one answered ; he could not make himself heard by any one in the street. At last an old man who passed by told him the sexton was not at home, but would return in an hour, as he had only gone to see a friend. As it was now nearly daylight Kerwan determined to walk up and down, and await his return. At last he appeared, and both men went at once to the church.

On the door of the vault being opened Kerwan expected to see the hussar rush out, but there was neither voice nor sound in the crypt. All was silent as the dead that had lain there for centuries.

A dreadful fear crept over Kerwan as a shout of horror from the sexton drew him quickly into the vault.

There lay the unfortunate young officer, stone dead ! The poisonous air of the vault and horror of his situation had killed him !

* * * * *

Years after in a Spanish monastery was a monk who had brought much wealth to the community, and whose self-inflicted penances were so severe that the brothers suspected his mind was burdened by remorse, and they judged rightly.

* * * * *

Some few days after Maria Fraser had last seen the ill-fated hussar, Mr. Neville brought her a letter found in the desk of his late brother officer. It was directed to her, and asked her to be his wife.

She never married, and could not forget St. George, who was her first love and her last.

A Romance of Modern London.

By CURTIS YORKE,

Author of "HUSH!" "THE MYSTERY OF BELGRAVE SQUARE," "THE BROWN PORTMANTEAU," "DUDLEY," "THE WILD RUTHVENS," "THAT LITTLE GIRL," etc., etc.

CHAPTER IX.

THE THAWING OF AN ICEBERG.

"She had

A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed ; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her ; but who passed without
Much the same smile ? "

ROBERT BROWNING.

IT was generally understood that Sir Cyril Northburgh was paying marked attention to Miss Adeane. And, as a matter of fact, the young man in question was as far gone as a man of his cool temperament could well be.

By the way, I am not at all sure that these apparently cool and unemotional individuals are by any means so cool and unemotional as they look. I have known some of them, upon occasion, disclose possibilities of fire and passion absolutely appalling. This, however, as I have said, by the way. If Sir Cyril had any such proclivities, he kept them well in hand, and presented a particularly successful *sang-froid* on all occasions, even when a little of the other thing might have been expected or condoned.

Bee and Fay made fun of his calm, self-satisfied ways, to be sure, as girls will ; but they liked him : Fay, as a cousin who was always at hand to be ordered about, confided in, and made use of generally ; Bee, as a goodnatured and reliable friend. But it had certainly never occurred to the latter to marry him. For one thing, he had not asked her to marry him ; and she was not the girl to construe a man's intentions matrimonially until they had been put into plain words. She would have missed him

a good deal if he had dropped out of her life just then, and, in a way, she was dimly conscious of this. For his part, he doubtless knew the wisdom of making himself indispensable to her, without—as yet—sounding the depths of her maiden heart.

Mr. Chandler—or, as I suppose we must now call him, Mr. *Chandleur*—approved of the young baronet's intentions. That is to say he approved of them in the meantime. If any wealthier or higher-born suitor turned up—why, Joseph Chandleur was not such a laggard in fashionable ways as to hesitate about whistling the gallant Cyril “down the wind” without the slightest compunction.

Lady Northburgh, however, was not altogether sure that she approved of her son's attentions to Miss Adeane. She disliked the “Chandleurs,” and could not be induced either to visit or be visited by them. But, as her sister somewhat severely impressed upon her, “the boy” might do worse—far worse.

“My dear Emily,” she said one day when the sisters were returning from a round of calls (Lady Dinwoodie found her sister's carriage very convenient upon occasion, and did not scruple to make extensive use of it)—“my dear Emily, I think the boy has shown very good taste, and an uncommon amount of good sense as well. Why the girl's fortune will be enormous, if all I hear is true—simply enormous. And she is well-bred, and not bad-looking—if not exactly a beauty. Really, when one contemplates the shocking *mésalliances* that some of our young men seem to take a pleasure in making now-a-days, you ought to sing hymns of praise—I think. As far as I can see, the aristocracy of the future will be the offspring of a parcel of barmaids, ballet-dancers and cooks—or worse.”

“I do so wish he and Fay had cared for each other,” murmured Sir Cyril's mother plaintively.

“Well, yes—I don't mind acknowledging that I was disappointed there too,” was the frank answer. “I am very fond of Cyril, and I have no absurd fancies about cousins not marrying. But Cyril doesn't care at all for Fay in that way—any more than she does for him. So it can't be helped. I wish I saw her safely married. She is young enough, of course; but I feel horribly certain that she will take a fancy to some quite impossible young man, and marry him in spite of all I can do. She is so self-willed and headstrong.”

"After all," said Lady Northburgh hopefully, "Cyril may change his mind."

"*Emily!*" was the exasperated answer—"upon my word you deserve to wake up some fine morning to find your son has married your cook. You do indeed."

Her sister smiled, and smoothed her well-fitting gloves pensively.

"I am not afraid of that," she murmured. "My cook is fifty if she is a day, and she is the ugliest woman I ever saw in my life."

Lady Dinwoodie sighed impatiently. There was no doing anything with Emily.

* * * * *

Cyril himself, meanwhile, was partaking of afternoon tea (a beverage he detested) in the Chandleurs' drawing-room.

Mr. Chandleur was in great form to-day, for on the previous evening he had exchanged a brace of sentences with his future Sovereign, and was therefore blatantly conscious that he had not lived in vain. He was standing with his legs very far apart, and his head held very far back, as he recounted to a comparatively new acquaintance the oft-told story of the accumulation of his millions. In his excitement he forgot to alternately foster and suppress his H's, and relapsed into all his old cockneyisms. An expression of bland contempt stole over his listener's countenance, but he did not see it. But Bee saw it, and she also saw the faint quiver of a smile under Cyril Northburgh's blond moustache. The smile irritated her. Her grandfather's solecisms in pronunciation, in etiquette, and various other matters did not amuse her at all; they only roused in her a painful sense of humiliation.

Cyril's smile was brief; for he was quick to see the frown that crossed his lady's expressive little face. He moved to a seat close to the tea-equipage, and said in his most conciliatory tones:

"May I have some tea?"

"Some more?" was the somewhat cross answer. "Why, Cyril, you have had three cups. And surely it was only yesterday you told me that you hated tea?"

"Did I?" he replied with unabashed serenity. "Very likely. But since then my medical adviser has prescribed tea—tea in large quantities."

"Well, there isn't any more," observed Bee, who had been

looking into the teapot. "And I'm not going to ring to have more made, because I saw you make the most dreadful face as you were finishing your last cup. And as for your medical adviser!—I don't believe you ever had anything the matter with you in your life," she added scornfully.

He laughed in his usual lazy fashion.

"Oh, yes, I have," he said, pulling the ears of Mrs. Chandleur's pug, who was investigating his boots with interest. "I had measles when I was a lad—and very badly too; and I had typhoid fever not so very many years ago. And just now," he added in a whimsical way he had when he felt a good deal—"just now I've got another kind of fever—the sort of fever a fellow has if—his heart's affected."

"Poor thing!" she said mockingly. "Is it very bad?"

"Very," was the grave answer. "Keeps me from sleeping at nights, don't you know, and takes away my appetite for everything—except tea."

Bee was looking at him with a curious expression, half-wistful, half-contemptuous, in her clear grey eyes.

"Cyril," she said slowly, "don't you think it is a great pity that you—who really could be sensible and interesting if you liked—should always talk in that chaffing, meaningless way—as if you had no ideas, and no brains, and no heart at all?"

He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"How do you know I have any of these commodities?" he said nonchalantly.

Nevertheless, there was a shade more colour in his handsome face than usual; and his eyes lost their sleepy look and became half-amused, half-resentful.

"Well—certainly neither your conversation nor your appearance would suggest as much," was the sharp and not very polite answer.

"Oh, thanks very much," he said with a satirical bow. Then he added in an exasperatingly calm and dispassionate kind of way, "Don't you think that was rather rude?"

Bee flushed painfully; but she looked mutinous and unrepentant, and busied herself in crumbling a biscuit into her empty tea-cup.

After a minute or so Cyril said, leaning slightly forward, and absolutely forgetting to caress his moustache in his earnestness:

"Is it always fair, Bee, do you think, to judge altogether from outward impressions?—or in any case to judge so hardly? Did it never strike you that in some cases a man may affect to feel little or nothing, because, as a matter of fact, he is afraid of showing—that he feels too much?"

"No," she made answer, with all the severity of youth. "I don't see why people should pretend to feel more or less than they do feel. Why should they? Why not be honest and true? I despise pretence and affectation."

"Do you despise me too?" said Cyril in a curious voice.

Just then Bee's attention was claimed by a young military Adonis of imposing proportions, whose income, which was small, was in exact inverse ratio to his expenditure, which was large—and who, therefore, looked with favourable eyes upon old Chandleur's presumptive heiress. Cyril breathed a silent imprecation concerning this gallant youth's future, and crossed the room to speak to the newest society beauty, Mrs. Osgood Graves. But, as a quaint and witty playwright has put it, "the goods were all in the shop-window." The beauty had been born without brains. She soon palled upon Sir Cyril, who rather affected brains, in moderation—and in conjunction with beauty, of course. No man will stand brains alone in a woman. That is his own prerogative.

Cyril did not see Bee again until a few evenings later. It was at a crowded dance at Mrs. Osgood Graves', and Cyril, having patiently elbowed his way up that lady's staircase, and greeted, perforce, all the acquaintances he particularly desired to avoid, found himself borne onwards up the long, brilliantly-lighted rooms until he at last caught sight of Miss Adeane, who vouchsafed him the smallest and chilliest of bows. She was talking with much animation to a rather sad-looking man of perhaps forty, or upwards, whose grey hair contrasted curiously with his dark eyes and eyebrows and brown moustache.

"Who the devil is the fellow?" thought Cyril in the enraged depths of his heart. "By Jove! one would think she had known him from childhood. I would give fifty pounds to know what she is saying to him."

As a matter of fact, this was what Bee was saying:

"Do you know that we are old friends, Mr. Debenham?"

"Are we?" he made answer in a puzzled voice. "Surely not. I hardly think I should have forgotten you."

"Think," she said gravely—"think far, far back—ten, eleven years ago?"

He shook his head.

"I can't forgive myself; but I'm afraid my memory must be treacherous," he said. "Besides—eleven years ago! Why—"

"Don't you remember," she went on in a slow, contemplative way, "being very kind, once upon a time, to a little girl who lived in a small street in Westminster, called Garth Street? Don't you remember a boy called Douglas Conrath, who—"

"Ah!" he interrupted her, with a sudden light of puzzled comprehension in his grey eyes. "But—why, it is not possible that you are his sister?—that you are little Bee? Oh, no—of course it is out of the question."

"Yes—I am little Bee," she said in a low voice, which seemed to her hearer to hold a ring of regret. "At least—I was—once."

"And—your brother—Douglas?" he asked, still looking surprised and somewhat bewildered. "I met him the other day, and he did not—" He stopped, and then went on: "Is he here to-night?"

She made a little negative gesture; then said sadly:

"He is not my brother—now."

"I don't quite understand," he said in his slow, gentle voice.

"Then listen, and I will tell you," she said.

He listened attentively while she told him how she had been taken away from her adopted brother, how she was no longer Bee Conrath, but Bee Adeane, and how she and Douglas met but seldom.

"You say you saw him—lately?" she said with a wistful upward look.

"Yes, I saw him some days ago, but only for a few moments," he answered.

"Ah!"—quickly. "And did he seem well?—happy?"

Debenham paused for a minute; then he said:

"No; I did not think he seemed either well or—happy."

The girl's eyes fell, and when she raised them again they were misty with tears.

"I hardly ever see him," she said in a tremulous voice. "He seems to avoid me—or not to care to see me—now."

"I think you misjudge him," her companion made answer gravely. "I am afraid the world has not been using him well of late, and—misfortunes make a man something of a hermit, you know."

"Why?" she asked. "If I were unfortunate, I think I should be more inclined than ever to turn to the companionship of my friends."

"Ah!" he said, with a strange little smile, "but that is one of the curses of misfortune—one doubts the possibility of having any friends at all. Adversity, for the most part, falls like a blight upon all love and friendship, misconstrues every action, magnifies every slight, and kills all sense of charity and goodwill. I know," he added with an almost intense earnestness, "because I have experienced adversity myself—more than one kind of adversity. And very hard lines I found it—and very badly I bore it. It is over now—thank God!—but I don't think I could ever forget its bitterness."

He sighed as he spoke, and pushed his hair back from his forehead with a gesture of weariness.

After a minute Bee said in a low voice:

"Did Douglas tell you if—if he were unhappy, or if he had been unfortunate in any way?"

"There are some things that do not need telling," he answered evasively. "Besides, I only spoke a few words with him."

"Did he—did he speak of me?"

"No. At least, I asked him if you were well, and he said you were. That was all."

All this time Cyril Northburgh was steadfastly regarding Bee and her companion from a distant doorway. Outwardly, he was calmly indifferent to all around him, as usual. Inwardly, he was consumed with rage and jealousy. At last he sauntered across the room, and took up an assured position at Bee's side. She was just presenting Debenham with a flower from the bunch on her bodice.

"For the sake of old times," Cyril heard her murmur.

"How do you do, Miss Adeane? Have you a dance to spare for me?" he said in the peculiarly distinct and clear tones he always adopted when in a passion—which, to do him justice, was not often.

"I'm afraid you are too late," she replied with an adorable

smile. "I see granny making wild signs to me across the room. We are going on, you know—to Lady Bilberry's crush. I suppose we shall see you there?"

"I thought of going for an hour," he said stiffly. "May I take you to Mrs. Chandleur?" he added, if possible, more stiffly still.

"No, thank you. Mr. Debenham was just going to take me to her when you came up. *Au revoir*," this with a gay little wave of her fan. "I shall see you shortly, I suppose."

Cyril replied by an icy bow. He too had quite intended "going on" to Lady Bilberry's crush, but with a determination much to be admired, he resolved to forego that pleasure, and spent the rest of the night at the Junior Carlton, in a most unholy temper. You see, he had made up his mind to propose to Bee that night; nay, I may go further, and say that he had made up his mind to become engaged to her that night. And the little minx's calm ignoring of his prospective rights (for *of course*, he argued, she must be aware of his intentions!), and her maddening familiarity with the unknown "fellow," piqued him inexpressibly.

* * * * *

And Douglas? Well, Douglas had written another novel, and three publishers had refused it—in those relentlessly courteous terms that sear the souls of would-be authors. Wherefore our author consigned the work of many feverish weeks to the flames, and opened his gates to Giant Despair. For his money was becoming unpleasantly scarce, and he had not yet found a successor to kind, eccentric old Simon Redman.

So the months ran on, and it was now October. One cold, wet night, when he was feeling particularly wretched, and physically ill besides, he found himself, he hardly knew how, writing swiftly and mechanically. The crowding thoughts flowed from his pen with hardly any effort of will. His characters moved, and spoke, and acted, like living responsible creatures. He wrote, for the first time, from his heart—for *himself*—with no thought of the Argus-eyed British public, no thought of any audience at all. He wrote without conscious conception, without pauses for contemplation of the pros and cons which usually worried him. He wrote steadily, and with few interruptions, for three days and nights. It seemed as if a fever possessed him. Sleep was impossible to him, food a nauseous necessity.

On the morning of the fourth day he wrote the last few words, threw down his pen, and rested his head on his hand. Oh, God! —how his temples throbbed and burned!—how his pulses leapt and quivered! He felt utterly exhausted—worn out in mind and body. Presently he rose, and rolled up the manuscript in feverish haste. A reckless determination took possession of him to send it off as it stood—without any of the conscientious corrections and revisals which as a rule he considered imperative.

“Let it sink or swim,” he muttered savagely, “I do not care. It is nothing to me.”

Ah! but he did care; and it was a great deal to him; and the days that followed were weary, weary waiting. His heart used to beat up to his throat like any nervous girl’s as he listened for the postman’s knock day by day and night by night, and at each fresh disappointment it sank in impotent misery and resentment.

And it came to pass at last, between anxiety, and actual want, and keeping at bay his hopeless love for Bee, that he fell ill, and became a prey to a nervous wasting fever, which brought him pretty near death’s door.

Max Fenwicke nursed him through the worst of it, and one day when his patient was very far through, took upon himself to despatch a little note to Miss Adeane. For Douglas in his feverish wanderings had partly betrayed his secret, and Max was rather an adept at the old, old sum of putting two and two together.

It was a bitterly cold, foggy night. Egyptian darkness prevailed outside, and even indoors the fog seemed to steal in and permeate all things. Douglas’s room, half bedroom, half sitting-room, was at no time a cheerful apartment. To-night—by the light of the one flaring candle—it looked inexpressibly dreary. The fire had burned low, for Fenwicke, tired out with many nights of watching, had fallen asleep; dust lay thick over everything, and a general air of indescribable confusion prevailed in the room.

The doctor had this morning pronounced his patient out of danger, and assured him cheerily that he would certainly “pull through” now. The patient himself felt that his “pulling through” was a matter of indifference to himself, and possibly to every one else. He turned over with a heavy groan, and raised himself painfully on his elbow. Yes—the room looked very dreary, and he felt weak and ill to wretchedness. Besides, he

was able to think consecutively now, and knew what this illness would cost him. He knew he must have been ill for at least nearly a fortnight ; and, as far as he could recollect, he had been able to count his shillings on one hand on the last day he remembered anything. Then he thought of his book. How had it fared ? Had it been returned, like its predecessor ? or had it been accepted ? Or, what was more than likely, was the old weary waiting going on still ? Then he thought of Bee, and fell back upon his pillows with a long shivering sigh. Max stirred and sat up, rubbing his eyes vigorously.

"Awake, old fellow ?" he said in his cheery voice. "Feeling better, eh ?"

The other shook his head. Then after a minute he said faintly : "Max—have any letters come—for me ?"

"Only one," was the prompt answer. "Here it is—square envelope, crest, and all the rest of it."

"Ah !" Douglas said in a tone of bitter disappointment. "You can open it."

It was only a card of invitation for a dance at Lady Dinwoodie's, and Max fitted it carefully into its envelope again, affecting not to see the other's quivering lips and tightly-clenched fingers. A little later he said :

"Look here, old fellow, I'm going out to get a paper. Is there anything you could fancy ? Oysters—jelly—fruit—or anything of that kind ?"

But Douglas turned away with a gesture of repulsion ; and presently Max took up his hat and went out.

The sick man lay quite still for a time, one thin hand pressed closely over his eyes as though to shut out the light—listening wearily to the monotonous ticking of the rickety clock upon the mantelpiece. The little insect we call the "death-watch" was also ticking fiercely from behind an old picture in one corner. To Douglas's sick fancy they seemed running a steady race. But the death-watch was always ahead. He felt horribly weak—as if he were gradually sinking away into nothingness ; then a sick, death-like faintness came over him and wrapped him in unconsciousness.

The opening of the door did not rouse him, and it closed again without his having opened his eyes. Then, all at once, his senses awoke.

Some one was bending over him ; a faint odour of violets

enfolded him ; a soft tremulous voice whispered his name. He uncovered his eyes and looked up with a start. A dim idea that he had died came over him, and that in another world the love had come to him that could never come in this. He tried to smile—to murmur some words of greeting ; then all was darkness.

When he came to himself again his dream had not vanished. Bee was there still.

He half-raised himself on one arm.

“Bee !” he whispered. “*Is it Bee ? I am not dreaming, then, or dead ? But, my dearest,*” with a troubled contraction of his brows, “*how did you come here ? I don’t—understand. It is not a place for you—and—*”

“Hush !” she interrupted him, laying her cool little fingers over his lips. “Why did you not let me know sooner that you were ill ? It was unkind of you.”

Her words floated through his brain without conveying much meaning to him. He was feeling strangely faint and giddy, and presently he turned his head towards the fireplace, where a man’s figure was leaning against the mantelpiece—the face in deep shadow.

“Is that you, Fenwicke ?” he said feebly. “You might give me—a little—water.”

But it was not Fenwicke who answered.

“Can I do anything for you ?” said a rather chilly voice—Cyril Northburgh’s voice, in fact.

The speaker came slowly forward, with an expression of disapprobation and reluctance about his whole personality which he could not for the life of him have helped.

Conrath looked weakly bewildered.

“You—Sir Cyril ?” he said, looking from him to Bee uncertainly. Then a sudden comprehension cut through his heart and held him dumb.

“I am sorry to see you looking so ill,” observed Sir Cyril (without, however, looking in the least sorry). “I must apologise for intruding upon you in this way ; but Miss Adeane had heard of your illness, and—er—was anxious—er—to come.”

“It was very good of her,” murmured poor Douglas, with a sickening certainty that Sir Cyril’s presence there could only mean one thing.

“Let me give you a little water,” went on Cyril in his cool, even tones. “Stay—I will raise your head a little.” As he spoke

he deftly passed his arm under the other's head, and held a glass of water to his lips. He could hardly have done less, to be sure ; but Bee's eyes more than thanked him.

Something in her old friend's haggard, worn face, and a certain wistful look in his sunken eyes as Cyril gently laid him down again, touched some latent chord in her tender little heart, and the next moment she had burst into passionate weeping.

Douglas flushed painfully, and Cyril bit his well-cut lips with annoyance. But Bee cried on most heartily for a minute or two ; then, just as Cyril was saying in a low suppressed voice, "Bee, for Heaven's sake try to compose yourself," she stopped almost as suddenly as she had begun.

But to Douglas her tears were sweet. Her lover had not entirely ousted her childhood's friend, then ? She was the old impulsive, loving Bee still !

"I couldn't help it," she said, with a piteous little smile, as she dried her eyes. "You look so ill, Douglas, my dear, and so—so lonely." And she squeezed one of his hands tenderly.

Sir Cyril glanced at his watch, and then said coldly :

"Are you ready to go now, Bee ? I am sure when Mr. Conrath knows that you are here against your grandfather's wishes—" He paused and settled his collar irritably.

"Sir Cyril is right, Bee," said Douglas in a very quiet voice. "You ought not to have come. Go now. Do not keep him waiting."

"Oh, Cyril doesn't mind," she answered carelessly. "Why, he brought me. When I heard two days ago that you were so very ill—(no, I shall not tell you *how* I heard)—I was so terribly grieved and miserable that I wanted to rush off with granny at once to nurse you. But grandfather found out that we were coming, and of course there was the usual scene. To-night is the only time he has been out of the house since. (He *had* to go to some dinner somewhere.) So I coaxed Cyril to bring me—granny wouldn't—and here I am. I *wish* I could stay and take care of you. But I suppose"—glancing from one to the other of the two young men—"it wouldn't do ?"

Douglas smiled—a half-sad, half-tender, smile.

"No, dear, it wouldn't do," he said with a touch of gentle reproof in his tone.

Sir Cyril gazed straight before him without speaking. Really,

he was thinking in an exasperated sort of way, there was something positively uncanny about Bee's reckless disregard of *les convenances* at times.

"The sooner matters are settled between us the better," he breathed silently to his moustache. For, as it happened, Bee had given him no opportunity of "settling matters," as yet.

Bee knew quite well that he was angry; but she did not care in the very least. She straightened up the room a little with a few of these indefinable, subtle touches which belong to women only, and made Cyril put some coal on the dying fire. Then, having received Douglas's assurances that Max Fenwicke was the best nurse in the world, and that he might be expected in at any moment now—when she had made him promise solemnly to let her know how he went on, and given him countless other injunctions, she went away—her sweet presence dying out of the dingy room like summer sunshine in a sudden storm, and leaving it dark and desolate.

Sir Cyril preserved an offended silence all the way to Portland Place. As for Bee, she was not thinking of him, and never even noticed his silence. But just as the hansom stopped at old Chandleur's door, she turned to her sulky companion and said—oh, ever so sweetly!—

"Cyril, you are the best and kindest fellow in the world, and I shan't forget your goodness to-night. Thank you most awfully." And giving his hand an impulsive little squeeze, she sprang out without waiting for his assistance, ran into the house, and disappeared up the broad staircase.

Sir Cyril's usually well-regulated heart beat quickly.

CHAPTER X.

"ALL UNKNOWING!"

"And should the twilight deepen into night,
And sorrow grow to anguish, be thou strong ;
Thou art in God, and nothing can go wrong
That a fresh life-pulse cannot set aright ;
That thou dost know the darkness, proves the light.
Weep if thou wilt, but weep not thou too long ;
Or weep and work, for work will lead to song."

GEORGE MACDONALD.

WELL, Conrath "pulled through," according to the doctor's predictions, and was soon going about again. As he had heard

nothing of his book, had got nothing to do, was considerably in debt, and had been obliged to borrow a ten-pound note from Fenwicke—who, as it happened, could ill afford to lend it—it may be imagined that he was feeling the reverse of cheerful.

About twice a week letters came from Bee—at which, though he kissed them, he smiled sardonically—reminding him that he had promised to “take care of himself,” and imploring him to take port-wine, fruits, jellies, strong soups, and various other little trifles which were about as accessible to him just then as the moon and stars. Douglas, we know, had always been a little inclined to be morbid when things went very far wrong; and as his system was necessarily much lowered by his late illness the depression that took possession of him now was well-nigh intolerable. And from his depression was born a dark resolve.

One day towards the end of November, when a damp, marrow-chilling mist seemed to cling like a wet blanket over all visible things, this young man so ill-treated by fortune was crossing St. James’s Park. It was late in the afternoon; dusk was already creeping over the city, and deepening into a thick fog. He approached the water, and sat down on one of the mist-bedewed seats—a most imprudent proceeding for a fellow in his indifferent health, to be sure—but prudence had ceased to be a point with him. In the little light the dying day afforded, one could see that his face wore a look that was both hopeless and reckless. His mouth was firmly set, and very, very sad. He had come to the “last fence”—the very last a man can take in this world.

And what was this, then, that he drew from the breast-pocket of his coat, and regarded with almost feverish longing? Ah, what? It was a way out of his troubles that thousands have taken, and tens of thousands have contemplated.

It meant no more debt, nor anxiety, nor passionate never-to-be-satisfied desire, nor baffled ambition, nor sleepless, care-haunted nights. It meant rest, tranquillity, oblivion. Ah, but *did* it mean all these? Well, at any rate, he thought drearily, the unknown future into which he was about to plunge could not hold anything much worse than the present held. Of course we all think much the same when we are hard hit, and down on our luck in love and fortune combined. It was fearfully cowardly of

him, of course. It was tantamount to confessing that he was not man enough, nor Christian enough, to bear the ills that life had put upon him. If you despise him heartily at this point, I cannot help it. For the matter of that, he despised himself.

He let his eyes stray over the sullen grey surface of the water, fingering absently the while the tiny pistol he held. It was Max Fenwicke's—one the latter had lent him months ago, when they were down at Poldornalupe. Max himself was there now—having tried unsuccessfully to get his friend to accompany him.

How cold it was in the silent park, with no sound but the monotonous lapping of the icy water! The would-be suicide shivered, and looked half wistfully around him. The passers-by were few, and evidently bent on reaching their various destinations as soon as possible. The fog was thickening fast; the trees assumed shapes ghostly and strange in the growing darkness. Conrath roused himself from the curious lethargy which was fast enwrapping him; his face grew a shade paler; his hand closed more tightly over the deadly little weapon he held. Just for a moment he thought of Bee, and with the thought his heart contracted painfully.

His finger touched the trigger.

Ah! what was that? Footsteps were approaching; and presently two figures loomed indistinctly through the yellowness of the fog. Conrath hastily concealed the pistol, and sat sullenly waiting until they should pass.

It was a girl's voice that came through the chilly stillness.

"Oh, Collins, here we are at the water again," it said, irritably. "We shall never get out of this place."

At the sound of the voice the solitary figure on the seat started violently, and half rose—then sat down again, and pulled his hat nervously over his eyes.

"Let us ask that man on the seat, miss," said another voice; "he'll maybe be able to direct us. It's going to be as dark as Egypt in another moment."

Douglas kept his eyes resolutely fixed on the ground, and did not look up as the voice he loved best in all the world said sweetly:

"Can you direct us, please, to the steps at the foot of the——"

Here the speaker broke off suddenly, and exclaimed in a joyful voice:

"Why, Douglas, is it *you*? Oh, I am *so* glad. Now we shall be all right. You did not know me, I suppose, in this dreadful fog. I have been to afternoon service in the Abbey, and very foolishly lingered listening to the music afterwards. When we came out we could hardly see a yard before us, and I'm sure I don't know how long we have been wandering about trying to get out of the park."

Conrath had risen, feeling giddy and sick. As Bee paused, he said half-mechanically :

"Poor child, you must be tired—and cold."

"Oh no, I am warmly wrapped up. But you, Douglas," she added anxiously, "you are shivering. Why, my dear, you look very ill; and you wrote me you were so much better."

"I shall be better—soon," he said in a strange expressionless voice.

She put her little hand through his arm.

"You have taken a chill," she said reproachfully. "How could you be so foolish as to sit here in the cold and damp—and without even an overcoat? Why—any one would imagine you didn't want to get well. I just came in time, I think."

He was silent.

"Why do you look so white and strange, Douglas?" she went on in a voice that was almost a caress. "And why were you sitting there in the fog and darkness? Is anything the matter?"

It was a moment or two before he answered; then he said, speaking seemingly with an effort:

"I—I was worried about things. I came here to—to think."

"Poor old dear," said the girl very gently. "What were you worried about? Tell me, Douglas. You know I always consider myself as your little sister, whatever they may say."

"Oh, I can't tell you," he said, with a half-weary, half-irritable inflection in his voice. "How could you possibly understand?" Then he added remorsefully, "Forgive me, Bee. I am out of sorts to-day, and—and not quite myself."

There was a dead silence after that, except for the rythmical tread of their feet on the greasy pavement. Quite a long time passed before Bee said thoughtfully :

"It is very strange, Douglas, but last night I dreamt that I saw you sitting just as you were just now—your head bent, your hat drawn over your eyes, and your hands clasped and hanging down

before you. And in my dream I cried—because I felt that you were in some great danger, I did not know of what. Then I saw that I had a letter in my hand for you ; but when I offered it to you, you shook your head, and would not take it. And at last you did take it, and opened it, and sprang to your feet with a loud strange cry. And then—I awoke."

Douglas smiled faintly.

"But you have not brought me the letter, you see," he said, letting his eyes rest for a moment upon her small earnest face, which he could hardly see through the thickening fog.

"Perhaps it is waiting for you at home," she made answer. "Who knows? Perhaps some hitherto unknown relation has died and left you all his money." And she laughed gleefully.

He laughed too—but his laugh rang bitter.

"I have only one relation in the world that I know of," he said. "And he is not likely either to die or to leave me any of his money."

"I said an *unknown* relation," was the impressive answer. "However, you will see when you get home. You are going home whenever you leave us, of course? Your clothes are as damp as they can be ; I quite expect to hear of your being laid up again," she added with a motherly little air of solicitude.

He was silent.

"You *will* go home and change your clothes, won't you ?" she repeated in an earnest voice.

"No, I am not going home just now," he answered evasively. "I have—something to do first."

"Douglas," she said, and there was a sharp ring of agitation in her pretty pathetic voice—"I am anxious about you, I don't know why. I can't rest to-night unless I know that you are safe at home. Dear Douglas, I may be foolish—but humour me—just this once." And her grey eyes grew heavy with tears.

Douglas pressed the dear little hand closer to his side. Did she know all she asked ?

"Very well," he said huskily. "I will do as you wish. I will go home now. I promise."

They were close to her home now, and at the foot of the steps he paused, and took her hands tightly in his.

Collins stood stolidly waiting.

"Good-bye," Douglas said, in a long half-sobbing breath.

"Good-night," Bee corrected him smilingly. "You will come to see me soon, I know."

"Good-bye," he repeated. And the next moment he had vanished into the fog.

He walked fast until he passed Tottenham Court Road; then his footsteps flagged, and grew heavy and uncertain.

As he neared his home a strange excitement took possession of him—an excitement that alternated with an overpowering bodily weakness. When he had let himself in he was trembling so that he had to pause for a minute or two before going any further. Then he mounted the staircase slowly and painfully.

His room was unlit, of course, and there was no fire. He sat down on the nearest chair to get his breath; for the long steep stairs tried him sorely. There is nothing so intolerable to a strong man as the enforced weakness that tedious convalescence brings. It is worse, far worse, to bear than any pain.

Presently he rose, struck a match, and lit the candle.

Then he saw that a letter lay on the table. It bore the name of the firm to which he had sent his book.

He tore open the envelope with shaking fingers. A strange singing was in his ears, the writing seemed to dance before his eyes, and for fully a minute its import was lost upon him. Then, with a thickly-beating heart, he read the following:—

"DEAR SIR,—

"In regard to the MS. one vol. novel, entitled 'Yesterday!' which you kindly left in our hands recently.

"We have read, and carefully considered the story, and are prepared to make you the following offer for it, should you agree to the terms. We should propose to offer you £500 for the copyright of the MS.—or, if this arrangement should not meet your views——"

Douglas read no more—then. The letter fell from between his trembling fingers. He sank into a chair, and hid his face on his arms. The sudden reaction—the shock of a relief so intense as to be almost pain—unnerved and unmanned him, and he sobbed like a child.

* * * * *

"Yesterday!" by "Michael Armstrong," was a great success. Reviewers praised it, the public took to it at once, and it "went"

like wildfire. In an incredibly short time it had reached its fiftieth edition. There was an indescribable pathos about it that touched all hearts, and yet it abounded in quaint, humorous passages that were irresistible. "Michael Armstrong's" name was made. Offers from countless publishers poured in upon him. He could command his own price for his work.

And how he worked! Night and day almost. At last he tasted the sweets of congenial and well-paid labour.

Nevertheless, he found time to go into the world a little. For he could afford it—now. Of course he was overwhelmed with invitations from all and sundry. Capricious London society bowed down before the successful author, as it bows down before all success. In the old days at Garth Street, when he was known to the literary world only through his short stories, he had had plenty of invitations too ; but his poverty, then, made him proud, and averse to mixing with his fellow-men. So he had refused them all, with the exception of perhaps one in twenty. It was different now.

People said he was a "most interesting young man," and, to romantic damsels, his habitual air of stern gravity made him more interesting still.

Perhaps his moment of dearest triumph was when Bee—her eyes full of happy tears—told him how proud she was of him. He had not told her of his identity with "Michael Armstrong," and she made the discovery one night at one of Lady Bilberry's little dinners—a dinner given in Douglas's honour.

"Oh, Douglas, how glad and proud I am," murmured Bee to him when he came up to her afterwards in the drawing-room. "If you knew how I have read all your stories, and how I cried and laughed over 'Yesterday!'—never dreaming that 'Michael Armstrong' was my dear old brother Douglas! Why did you never tell me, you unkind boy? You might have trusted me."

He looked at her strangely for a moment or two ; then he told her of that night when he had found the letter as she had laughingly predicted. But he did not tell her from what her gentle hand had, all unknowing, saved him.

And she never knew.

In the course of the evening, Mr. Chandleur congratulated him loudly and pompously. It appeared he had always divined "what was in him," and seen his latent talent. So he flattered

him fulsomely, called him his "dear lad," his "clever young friend," his "girl's adopted brother, and childhood's friend," etc., etc.

It so happened that at this same dinner Ralph Debenham was one of the guests. He had called upon Douglas several times in Guilford Street—twice before the latter's illness, and once or twice since, but had only on one occasion found him at home. Douglas now shared Fenwicke's rooms in Charles Street, and was making friends fast, as rising men—and women too—invariably do. It is always so, as a certain wise old book tells us :

"Unto everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

It is cruel, is it not? A hundredth part of the adulation and praise showered on fortune's favourites would be so thankfully and eagerly received by the struggling, unknown, lonely ones! But no ; it is the way of the world now—as it was nearly nineteen hundred years ago—that those who are starving shall be grudged even the crumbs, and that their more fortunate brethren shall be plied without ceasing with that which sickens them.

Douglas, however, as was only natural, was not yet sickened with the fruits of success. But he bore his honours well, and without assumption. Debenham watched him curiously to-night—not finding it difficult, nevertheless, to identify this grave, rather stately young man, who looked so much at home in his faultless evening-dress, with his shabby, starved-looking clerk of old times. The boy had always been what the man would always be—a gentleman.

"And so, Mr. Conrath, you have really turned out to be an author," Fay Dinwoodie was saying to him in slow contemplative tones—"a successful author! Do you know, I am a little surprised. And I think I am a good deal—disappointed."

"I can understand that you should be surprised," he said with his grave smile, "but why, if I may ask, should you be disappointed?"

She paused a moment, playing absently with her fan, before she answered. Then she said somewhat unwillingly :

"I am disappointed because, though I do not know you very well, I had made up my mind that you were so thoroughly truthful and genuine. In London, you know, one learns to appreciate old-fashioned qualities such as these."

"I admit that I am old-fashioned," he answered, letting his eyes wander across the room to where Bee was smiling upon Cyril Northburgh; "but why must I admit that truthfulness and genuineness are incompatible with my profession, Miss Dinwoodie? It is considered an honourable one enough."

Fay shook her flaxen head.

"It seems to me that an author cannot be altogether true and single-minded," she said slowly. "He must necessarily view all surrounding circumstances as he views his imaginary circumstances. He must work them up to the best advantage, and relate them—not as the bald facts they may possibly be—but dressed out and embroidered, and shown up in the strongest possible light—the pathos intensified, the humour exaggerated, little artistic touches added here and there to heighten the general effect. In short, to an author, all his world, his friends, their joys and sorrows, their good points and their bad points, are simply so much—what do you call it?—*copy*. Nothing is too sacred for portrayal. All emotions writhe under the successful author's strong, relentless, magnifying glass, for the delectation of the British public later on. It seems very cruel, very heartless, I think—almost ghoulish."

Douglas had read something very like the above tirade in one of the monthly magazines; but of course he did not say so, being aware, doubtless, that some eclectic minds unconsciously adopt other people's opinions, and claim them for their own.

I think Fay was looking less elfish and more womanly than usual to-night. At least Douglas fancied so. It was with a smile almost as gentle as those he used to keep in the old days for Bee that he answered :

"I think you are a little prejudiced, are you not? For my own part, I have never made 'copy' of my friends—I feel sure I should not turn out good work if I did. I fancy all an author sees and hears soaks unconsciously into his brain, to lie dormant there until his pen as unconsciously calls it out. Deliberate, forced caricatures, and exaggerated reproductions of individual characters and their traits, rarely touch the will-o'-the-wisp of public fancy. So I have heard, and such has been my experience. Nevertheless, I have heard the question ably argued from the other side. But do not let us talk 'shop,' Miss Dinwoodie. There is nothing more tempting to an author's soul, and nothing more

dangerous to his mind's equilibrium. You sing, do you not ? Will you let me take you to the piano ? ”

“ Yes—if you will choose a song,” she answered, looking up quickly from under her long lashes.

Her mother, seeing the look, frowned and sighed. Of course this gifted and popular young man was all very well, and very good to look at, as well as pleasant to talk to—but after all he was a nobody, and literature was but a precarious calling. Dear, dear, it was very annoying.

It was a plaintive little song of Christina Rossetti’s that Fay sang, and the words were these :

“ Come to me in the silence of the night ;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream ;
Come with soft rounded cheeks, and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream.
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

“ O dream, how sweet ! so sweet, too bitter-sweet,
Whose waking should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimful of love abide and meet ;
Where thirsting, longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more !

“ Yet come to me in dreams that I may live
My very life again though cold in death :
Come back to me in dreams that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath ;
Speak low, lean low—
As long ago, my love, how long ago ! ”

Fay looked almost pretty when she sang, and Douglas was surprised at the soul and pathos her voice held. He was almost equally surprised to find himself talking to her for the rest of the evening. He had no more conversation with Bee ; indeed she appeared very well occupied with Sir Cyril.

Douglas had not asked her if her engagement were an accomplished fact. It seemed an impending fact, and that was sufficient for him. He could not speak of it—yet.

One night about a week later, it happened that Debenham had come up to spend an hour or so in the rooms shared by Conrath and Fenwicke in Charles Street. The latter was out ; and the

two mén whose lives had touched and parted so long ago sat smoking and talking far into the morning.

Dual solitude, the small hours, satisfactory pipes and tobacco—all these combined are powerful factors in masculine confidences ; and Debenham, to-night, half-involuntarily raised a corner of the curtain that hid his past life—a life which, in one respect at least, had been a terrible failure. They had been talking in a somewhat desultory fashion for some time, and a few curt words from Douglas had given the other a glimpse of what he guessed to be the one cankered spot in the lot of this young man so apparently beloved by fortune.

" You have a splendid future before you, Conrath," said the older man, after puffing at his pipe for some time in silence—" a future any man might envy you. Take the advice of one who has had many years of weary experience ahead of you, and don't mar your life as fifty out of every hundred promising young fellows do—by making a hasty, ill-considered marriage."

There was a curious underlying excitement in the speaker's voice which was very foreign to his usual quiet tones.

Douglas's face flushed somewhat.

" I have no intention of marrying," he said slowly.

Debenham looked at him keenly for a few silent seconds ; then he filled his pipe again, and said in a slow unwilling kind of way :

" I don't know why I should tell you—I never spoke of it to any one before. But I like you, Conrath. I used to fancy that if I had had a son, I should have wished him to be like you. I feel strongly on the subject of early marriages, because—my own marriage has cursed all my life, and left upon it a shadow that can never be lifted."

Douglas looked up quickly.

" Why, Debenham," he said in surprised tones, " I did not know—it never occurred to me—that you were a married man."

The other struck a match before he spoke, then he said in a low voice :

" No, I daresay not. Nevertheless, I have been married for more years than I care to think of."

Neither spoke for a few moments ; then Debenham went on :

" I was only a lad—hardly twenty—when I became a husband ; and my wife was a mere child. I fancied myself very much in love, of course—she was marvellously pretty—and for a time I

suppose we were happy enough. I knew nothing of her family—in fact I knew very little about herself, except that she was an orphan, and lived with a rather vulgar old woman at Brixton. When we had been married for about six weeks I became aware that my young wife had a temper that was nothing more nor less than devilish—so ungoverned was it. I can give you no adequate description of the terrible scenes that gradually made my home a perfect hell to me. I suppose I had a temper too; I suppose I was partly to blame. I know I avoided my home and my wife as much as possible. Later, I learned that she consoled herself by the inordinate use of—of stimulants; and that, of course, made her temper worse than ever. I don't know if she had ever really loved me. I fancy not. Things got from bad to worse," he went on slowly; "I still have the mark of a knife she once threw at me—with an unhappily correct aim—in one of our frequent quarrels. We had one little child—a girl"—here the speaker's voice faltered. "But, oh God!—I—I can't talk of it—it is too horrible."

He stopped suddenly, turned rather white, and covered his eyes with his hand for a moment or two.

Douglas sat silent—touched and moved by the shadow of a trouble before which his own sank into comparative insignificance.

Presently Debenham spoke again. His face looked worn and old. "Well," he went on in a hard voice—"they said she was insane.—dangerously insane. So—I had to let them take her away. She has been in the asylum at Stockley for what has seemed to me an endless term of years. You will be shocked, perhaps, if I say that I have longed—nay, prayed for her death many a time. For—God help me!—with all my soul I have learned to love another woman."

There was a long silence after that. Then Douglas said abruptly: "And—the child?"

Debenham raised his head with an inexpressibly anguished look in his tired dark eyes.

"Did you not understand?" he said in a hoarse, choked voice. "She—killed it!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Douglas involuntarily.

"I found out afterwards," continued the other with a curious expression on his quiet face, "that her mother, her sister, and a few other members of her family had all died raving mad."

At this moment the door opened and Max Fenwicke came in—jovial, gay, and slightly facetious, as usual.

"Hullo, you two!" he exclaimed, slapping them successively on the back. "How glum you both look! Been unearthing old skeletons—eh?"

He turned up the lamp, stirred the fire, and threw himself into a chair. His light jesting words jarred upon the other two; and both were silent.

Good fellow as he undoubtedly was, Fenwicke was apt, at times, to jar upon certain moods. He would have been very much surprised, and genuinely repentant too, I suppose, if he had known how often he made such of his friends who did not regard life in general from his own ever-facetious point of view, wince under the unconscious sting of his perpetually jesting tongue; for he was the kindest-hearted fellow breathing. But, as we all know, "a difference of taste in jokes is a great strain on the affections." After all, perhaps, I have wronged him a little—for he had his quieter moods; but they only occurred, as he himself would have put it, "once in a blue moon."

* * * * *

On the following day Douglas accompanied Fenwicke to Poldornalupe, where operations were already in progress preliminary to sinking a shaft in search of the mineral (tin, it was, I believe) regarding which Max was so sanguine. Douglas was beginning to share his friend's enthusiasm; and as a matter of fact he had agreed to put £300 into the concern, which was all he could spare in the meantime. As yet, however, only a few workmen were employed, and the expenses were comparatively small.

On arriving at Poldornalupe, Fenwicke was informed that the foreman who was conducting operations desired to see him.

"Well, Dempster," he said quickly, as the man came forward. "Any news?"

"Yes, sir," the other answered in a tone of suppressed importance, "It is as I thought at first. We are on the top of a rich lode, I am certain. See here."

He produced from his pockets what appeared to Douglas's inexperienced eyes nothing more nor less than a few lumps of dirty stone. But Fenwicke examined them eagerly.

Then he turned to Douglas, his face somewhat pale.

"By Jove, we're on it!" he said, in quick excited tones. "Old fellow—our fortune's made!"

And Douglas—being necessarily a novice in mining matters—had a bewildered sense of their being prospective millionaires.

Of course they started off immediately to the scene of action, and, arrived there, Fenwicke declared that the indications were even more promising than he had previously imagined them to be. Indeed, there seemed little doubt of the presence of a very fair-sized lode, the width of which it was, of course, impossible to conjecture as yet. It was arranged that a shaft should be sunk at once, slightly to the west of the preliminary workings, and Dempster was ordered to put fresh men on to the work in the shortest available space of time. Max was as eagerly excited as a boy. Even his dinner was a matter of little moment to him—which was well, to be sure, as the individual who superintended the meals at Poldornalupe was unacquainted with even the most primitive ideas of cooking, knowing no medium, indeed, between sending all viands to the table perfectly raw, or burnt to a cinder. To-night, the former mode was in favour. The "mine-owners" (as Fenwicke had already christened Douglas and himself) were, however, for the nonce, superior to gastronomic disappointments. They made a hearty meal of bread and cheese, supplemented by a fair supply of good Scotch whisky—and spent the rest of the evening in concocting glorious plans for the future.

(To be continued.)

Love Sonnet.

FROM THE SPANISH.

IF to see thee be to love thee,
If to love thee be to prize
Naught on earth, or Heaven above thee,
Not to live—but for those eyes !
If such love to mortal given
Be wrong to earth, be wrong to Heaven,
'Tis not for thee the sin to blame,
Since from thine eyes the madness came.
If thou forgive the crime of loving,
In this heart more pride t'will raise,
To be thus wrong, with thee forgiving,
Than right, with all the world to praise !

C. FRASER.